NEW WORLDS SCIENCE FICTION

No. 28 1/6

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NEW WORLDS

PROFILES

C. M. Kornbluth

New York, U.S.A.

At 31 years of age, Cyril Kornbluth can already look back on a long record of publishing successes primarily in the science fiction field. A native New Yorker, he was educated in that city and commenced writing while still at college, becoming a fulltime author upon leaving. Enlisting in the Army he served three years with a combat infantry battalion mostly in Europe during the recent war and afterwards continued his education at the University of Chicago.

While in Chicago he took a job on a news agency, eventually rising to bureau chief, and also commenced writing science fiction once again. In 1951 he resigned his job and returned to New York and fulltime fiction writing, having produced since then innumerable short stories and as many as eleven book-length novels, a number of them in collaboration.

His most outstanding novel to date is *Takeoff*, published in U.S.A. by Doubleday and recently serialised in *New Worlds*. He has had another novel, *The Syndic*, published by the same company, has collaborated successfully with Frederick Pohl to produce *The Space Merchants* (third in this year's International Fantasy Award), and *Search The Sky*, and under the pseudonym of " Cyril Judd " together with Judith Merril *Gunner Cade* and *Outpost Mars*.

He lives in an up-state New York farmhouse with his wife and two children writing a little a day and constantly polishing his work, having no formal hobbies but taking an interest in practically every human activity except sport.

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NEW WORLDS SCIENCE FICTION

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Cover painting symbolising " Homecoming "

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From Correspondence

Correspondence has been particularly heavy of late—more especially since we started serialising Wilson Tucker's very fine novel *Wild Talent* which reaches its conclusion in this issue—unfortunately. I say 'unfortunately' because it is the type of story that has appealed both to regular and new readers alike, having been so well contrived that one would wish it to go on indefinitely.

Let me clear up two points which have been bothering some of you. In the first instalment Tucker mentioned Paul Breen reading three books which he obtained from the Public Library. They were *Extra-Sensory Perception* and *New Frontiers Of The Mind* both by Joseph Banks Rhine, and *Studies In Psychokinesis* by Dr. William Roy. Many readers wrote in asking where they could obtain a copy of the latter and one reader telephoned and stated that he had been in touch with the British Museum but could find no trace of it. The two books by Dr. Rhine are, of course, legitimate ones, but the title by Dr. Roy is one Tucker invented—for reasons which are now obvious when you have read the end of the story.

On the title page of the original book version as with the Contents Page of this magazine there is a statement " All characters are fictitious and any resemblance to living persons is entirely coincidental." I can only quote that expression in reply to the number of people who point out that most of the characters in Tucker's story appear to have the names of well-known science fiction personalities.

Younger and more enthusiastic readers still enquire when *New Worlds* will have a permanent letter section. To that request I will state that " Postmortem " will be featured when space permits and when the subject matter of such letters available has something to contribute to science fiction in general and not this magazine in particular. I would rather publish fiction than spare space for arguments on the merits or de-merits of stories we publish, knowing that 90% of such arguments are based solely upon personal likes and dislikes.

I would like to see more letters or post cards listing the story preferences each issue so that I can obtain a wider cross-section of public opinion. To facilitate our growing overseas readership participating more actively in this particular department I propose allowing a three-month interval before publishing the ratings, effective as from next month.

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It is not a policy of mine to publish eulogies by readers about this magazine—it is as one-sided an opinion as story preferences. Readers who like *New Worlds* usually write in and say so at some time or another when a particular reason arises requiring correspondence. People who do not like the magazine very obviously do not buy it and have no reason to write and say so, although there *is* the isolated individual who doesn't like us but buys the magazine regularly and does write to say so !

All policies being flexible, however, I am prompted to use one extremely interesting quotable quote from American author Alfred Bester, whose novel *The Demolished Man* was second in this year's International Fantasy Award. This magazine being primarily designed for readers throughout the British Commonwealth and Empire (and almost to the exclusion of residents of the United States), such an unsolicited opinion as Mr. Bester's is of great value in comparing our standards with those of his own country. Mr. Bester, at present in this country to write TV film scripts for an American company, recently called at my office ostensibly looking for something to put him in a ' mood ' for writing his next science fiction novel. I couldn't think of anything more critical to offer than some recent issues of *New Worlds*.

His reaction, after several weeks of hibernation in Surrey, is one of those rare letters British editors seldom expect to receive, considering the fact that we have been trailing the American field for so many years. He states, " After saturating myself with your magazines for over a month, I must write to tell you how wonderful I think they are and to compliment you upon a splendid job. Through my association with Horace Gold (editor of *Galaxy Science Fiction*), I am faintly aware of the headaches of the editor—of finding enough good material to fill his book each issue and enough variety to satisfy every class of reader. This is a job which I think you are doing splendidly.

" I haven't a criticism to level at your books and I have dozens of stories I would like to single out for a hearty thump on the back, but I mustn't play favourites. The books are beautifully put together and your editorials make more sense than editorials usually do."

Under the circumstances I couldn't let those remarks pass unnoticed into my happy-memory file—next month Alfred Bester will be featured both in the contents and on the " Profile " page.

John Carnell

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When space flight eventually comes, how normal will a pilot's home life be ? On his return to Earth from the long voyage between the planets what changes will have taken place amongst his family and friends ? Or will their lives have been as normal as if he had been with them ?

HOMECOMING

By E. C. Tubb

Illustrated by HUTCHINGS

He had bought it on Venus; a little thing, carved from exotic woods and ornamented with plumes and tufts of brilliantly coloured feathers. The eyes were tiny gems, the arms and legs cunningly jointed, and the face had a peculiar, lopsided grin as if the maker had impressed some of his own humour into the inert material. It looked a little like a distorted mannikin, a caricature of a man, a three-dimensional cartoon, and it had the unmistakable stamp of primitive art.

It was a doll.

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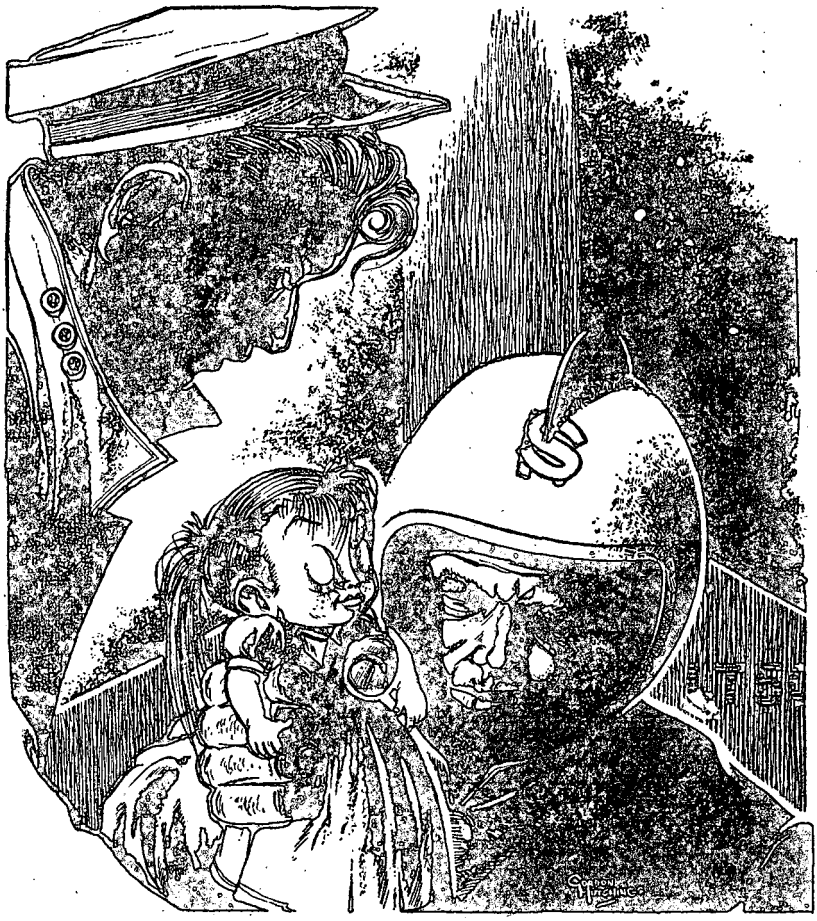

John Carmody looked at it as it sat propped against the metal of a bulkhead, the light reflecting in tiny glitters from its eyes, and wondered again whether or not he was doing the right thing. It didn't weigh much, of course, only half a kilo, but even that was something to be considered when the load was calculated by the gram.

He shrugged. It was too late to worry about it now. They had already landed and soon he would have to pass the inspection shed. Memory of the inspectors gripped his stomach with sudden doubt,

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the regulations were strict, and no excuse could mitigate the crime of smuggling excess weight aboard the rocket ship. Maybe he shouldn't have bought it. Dolls were to be had by the million here on Earth, ordinary dolls made of sterile plastic and smoothly fashioned limbs. Dolls that wore clothes, cried, closed their eyes, had real hair and proportionate bodies. Dolls which could walk, talk, even dolls which wet themselves, and had to be changed just like a real baby. But this doll was special.

This was for his own child.

He smiled as he thought of it, counting as he had done a hundred times before the slow passage of the weary months. Three to Mars, three to Venus, three back to Earth. Nine months plus a few days stopover time. The baby would be over three months old now, a wizened little scrap of humanity which was part of him, reaching up with tiny starfish hands, gurgling, smiling with a baby smile and chuckling at secret baby thoughts.

He could hardly wait to see it.

Carefully he slipped the doll beneath his tunic, patting at the bulge and glad that the thin garment hung loosely on his shoulders and chest. Footsteps clattered on the metal of the stairs and a man called to him as he passed.

"Coming, John?"

"I'm right with you." He patted at the bulge again then swung from the compartment and climbed up towards the nose of the ship.

As usual he was the last. He hesitated at the open port, letting his eyes drift over the expanse of the landing field, staring at the crowd clustered around the high wire fence, trying to recognise one face from hundreds, turned, like pale white blobs, towards the soaring perfection of the slender rocket ship.

He frowned, then smiled with relieved understanding. Of course. Norma couldn't have come to meet him, not with a young baby to look after, but despite his own logic a chill finger of worry touched his heart.

Surely she could have brought the baby with her?

Or perhaps the baby was ill!

The metal rungs of the built-in ladder stretching from nose to base of fin almost seared his hands from the speed of his too-rapid descent. The ground slammed against the soles of his shoes, jarring him, and reminding him with the unyielding impact that he was no longer in free fall. He staggered a little, then forced his quivering legs to carry him at a half-run towards the squat bulk of the administration buildings hunched next to the gate in the high wire fence.

A hand caught at him, slowing him to an abrupt halt.

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"Steady, John, you want to strain your muscles?" The engineer grinned at him, still gripping his arm and forcing him to walk slowly and steadily across the seared dirt. "You can't run like that just after landing, not after three months in free fall you can't, you'll wind up with twisted tendons, strained cartilages, and your muscles will be so sore that you won't be able to move for days."

"I know that, Lance, but I'm worried. Norma isn't here."

"So what? Maybe she's waiting in the car, or at home, or anything. Maybe she's left a message. Quit worrying."

Lance grinned at the pilot and waved to the watching crowds. "You'd think that people would get tired of watching take-offs and landings. After all, what is it—just a giant rocket going up—see one and you've seen 'em all. Me, I'd rather have a nice beer."

John grunted, still examining the crowd with eager eyes, still hoping. He couldn't see her, and worry grew within him like a searing ball of stomach-knotting fire. Eagerly he stumbled up to the message clerk, snapping his fingers to attract the man's attention.

"Carmody. John Carmody. Have you a message for me?"

"Carmody?" The man frowned, then shook his head. "No, sir. No message."

"Are you certain?" John swallowed, the worry growing within him. "Check again will you it's rather important."

"Yes, sir." The clerk rifled the message slips with practised ease, and watching him, John knew that he was wasting the man's time.

There was no message.

The formalities were few and quickly over. He stepped on the scale, hoping that he had fasted enough to lower his weight the necessary half kilo, and then stepped into the shower room. He hid the doll while he showered and tried to hide it beneath his street clothes. It made an awkward bundle, and after a while he held it openly in his hand, too worried to care what the inspectors would think about it. He signed for his personal papers, useless in space, but essential here, and received keys, wallet, and money.

One of the inspectors touched his arm just as he was stowing away the remainder of his gear.

"What's that under your arm, Carmody?"

"A doll. Why?"

"Imported?"

"Yes. I got it on Venus. We had a short load and I fasted to bring my weight down." He stared up at the man. "Anything wrong in that?"

"There could be." The man took the little thing, examining it

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with a critical eye, testing it for hollowness and brushing his finger across the tufted feathers. "You know better than to try smuggling, Carmody. How long have you been a pilot?"

"Five years, and I was an engineer before that."

"Then why do it?

John shrugged, knowing that the inspector was right in what he said, and yet somehow, just not caring.

"I got it for my baby," he said bitterly. "A toy, nothing more than that, and yet you try to make a crime out of it."

"It is a crime," reminded the inspector quietly. "You know the weight limitations. This thing weighs what? Half a kilo? That could take a lot of fuel to lift and set down again."

"I told you that I'd fasted, my max weight's the same as when I left earth, you don't have to tell me about weight restrictions."

He stared up at the Inspector, half-defiant, half-apologetic, knowing that he had done wrong and yet hoping to get away with it.

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I should report it," said the man slowly. He stared down at the little doll, turning it over in his hands, smiling a little at the humorous expression on the carved face. "You say you got this for your baby?"

"Yes."

"Good for you. Boy or girl?"

"I don't know yet. It was born about three months ago, while I was on Venus, that's what made me get the doll." He swallowed and glanced at his wrist watch. It had stopped, unwound for nine months, and he unstrapped it, his fingers twirling the spindle as he stared at the big clock against the wall.

"Look, I'd like to get away as soon as possible. My wife isn't here and I'm worried about her. What are you going to do about the toy?"

The man hesitated, then thrust the doll towards Carmody, his eyes flickering as they glanced around the big room.

"Take it. Take it and forget that I ever saw it, it's both our jobs if you don't." He smiled at the relieved expression on the pilot's face. "I've got three kids of my own and I know just how you feel. But make this the last time, eh?"

"Sure," promised John gratefully. He tucked the doll beneath his arm, strapped the adjusted wrist watch on his arm, and sweeping up the rest of his belongings almost ran from the building.

Outside the crowds had thinned to a scattering of people still watching the silent shape of the rocket ship. A party of schoolboys clung to the wire, their shrill voices sounding like a flock of disturbed crows as they made rash promises as to what thay would be when they grew up.

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Several couples strolled arm in arm, their eyes soft as they whispered promises which were as old as time itself, and blithely ignored the apparent reason for their presence at the landing field.

A bus, heavily loaded with sightseers, jerked from the parking ground with a whine from its turbine, and several small, beetle-shaped family cars joined the procession heading back to the city. In a few minutes the parking area had cleared, and aside from a few couples, the crowd had gone—but he still hadn't found his wife.

He leaned against the side of a public videophone booth, his breath rasping through his throat and sweat trickling in uncomfortable warm stickiness down his face and neck. His leg muscles jumped and quivered with the unaccustomed strain and his heart thudded painfully against his ribs. He was being a fool and he knew it. After three months in free fall he should have taken things easy, let himself get used to the drag of restored weight, given his heart and muscles a chance to adapt to the extra strain.

Instead of that he had raced around the parking area, staring into cars and searching the faces of complete strangers, running from one group to another and forcing himself between men and women who had stared at him, then shrugged, then laughed.

After a while he straightened from the side of the booth, then, fumbling for coins, jerked open the door and reached for the transceiver. His fingers felt stiff and awkward as he dialled the familiar number and he waited, the receiver against his ear, and a growing sickness welling inside of him.

There was no reply from the house.

He stood, listening to the interrupted droning of the attention signal, his mind a racing whirl of speculation and surmise. She could have gone shopping, had an accident with the car, become stranded away from a videophone. She could have had an accident and be lying now in some hospital. The baby could be ill, dangerously ill, and she had forgotten to send a message. She . . .

Slowly he replaced the handset.

Clumsily he dialed a second number, his fingers shaking as he tried to thrust them into the correct holes, the coins spilling from his hand as he fumbled them into the slots. The drone of the attention signal echoed from the earpiece, then. . .

"Larrimer here. Yes?"

"Bill," John whispered. "John here, John Carmody."

"John!" The voice lost its casual indifference. "How are you? Just arrived?"

"Yes."

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" Good for you. Have a nice trip?"

" As usual. Bill, is Norma with you?"

" Norma?" The voice changed, seemed to shield itself with a veil of caution. " Why no, John. Isn't she at home?"

"No. I've 'phoned there, and she isn't at the field either, I'd hoped that she might be with you."

"No, John, we haven't seen her for quite a while now." The voice altered again, became charged with a false cheerfulness. "She is probably on her way home, John, you know how women are, no idea of time at all."

"You think so?"

"I'm sure of it, John. Why don't you get home, surprise her, I bet that she's even forgotten what date it is."

"Thanks, Bill, I'll do that." He hesitated, not liking to appear too worried, and yet eager for news. "Bill."

"Yes?"

"What was it, Bill? Boy or girl?"

Silence—silence and the steady hum of the connection. John thought he heard a swift mutter of conversation, muffled as though someone had pressed a hand over the mouthpiece. He frowned, annoyed with himself that he hadn't made full sound-screen contact, but it hadn't seemed necessary and he wasn't used to the videophone.

" Bill ! Are you there, Bill?"

" Sorry, John," said the voice apologetically, " something's just come up. Call me later, eh?"

" But the baby?" The click of the broken connection sounded strangely loud and for a moment he stared at the blank screen of the videophone, tempted to make full visual contact and repeat his question. Someone rapped impatiently on the door of the booth, a pudgy-faced matron with hard snapping eyes and a ridiculous hat perched on an elaborate coiffeur. He ignored her, dialing his own home again, and listening with mounting desperation to the steady mechanical drone of the signal.

The matron rapped again, her thin lips pursed into a tight crease and her hard eyes narrowed with arrogant rage. She rapped, the thick gold of her rings almost threatening to break the glass of the door, then jerked open the panel.

" Young man, "she snapped. " Isn't it about time you let someone else use the phone?"

Slowly he replaced the handset, his mouth dry with the worry and irritation. He stared at her, at her smug arrogance, her ridiculous hat and her heavy rings. He stared at her, and something in his expression made her release the door and take a step backwards away from the booth

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He brushed past her, not really seeing her, not seeing anything, his mind twisted with worry and doubt.

He had to get home.

A turbo-cab took him to the city, and there he managed to hire a heliocab to take him the fifty miles to his home. There were cheaper ways of travel; he could have waited for the monorail or the passenger bus, but impatience gnawed him and the inaction was more than he could tolerate.

He sat hunched in the tiny cab, the wheel of the rotating vanes a shimmering blur above his head, and stared down at the streaming green-brown-grey of the landscape below. It was getting dark, the sun rested on the horizon, a flaming ball of red and gold, tinting the clouds with fingers of aureate splendour, washing the pale blue of the heavens with a film of orange brilliance and touching the drab reality of the world with sheer magic.

It was a perfect evening, and if only Norma had met him, it would have been a wonderful experience. She could have brought the baby, and he would have played with it during the long drive home. She would have driven of course, she always did, and they would have talked of all the little things that had happened during the past nine months.

Trifling things, how the baby had looked when born, what it had weighed, what the doctors had said and the nurse and all their friends. They would have argued about names and schools and professions. They would have discussed toys and diets and modern methods of rearing. They would have resumed the close intimacy a man should have with his wife, and the roads would have spun beneath the wheels, the night would have closed around them, and the long, lonely months in space would have vanished like an unpleasant dream.

If she had met him.

He frowned at the sharp stab of worry and doubt. What had kept her? Why couldn't she have left a message, a word, something? Space ships were regular if nothing else, they stuck to a rigid schedule, They had to, and aside from at the most an hour each way, they were always on time. What wife could forget the date of her husband's arrival?

Other wives met the rocket ships. Sweethearts, relatives, sisters and brothers, mothers and children, strangers and sightseers. They always met the ships, staring with wondering eyes as the slender pillar of smooth metal descended on a thundering pencil of flame. Why not Norma? He shifted on his seat, trying desparately to quell the worry within him, trying to justify the unjustifiable.

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Norma would have the worry of a new-born baby. A tiny mite, demanding full attention and the utmost care. His features softened as he thought of it, losing some of their hard tension, the muscles relaxing into something like a smile. Norma had wanted a child so much. She had almost been desperate for a baby of her own, the mother-hunger burning within her had shone nakedly from her eyes whenever she had seen a friend with a baby, and she had waited so long.

He frowned again, remembering the conversation with Larrimer, he still didn't know whether it was a boy or a girl. He felt the bulk of the doll on the seat beside him, and smiled down at the oddly humorous expression on the carved wooden face. It would be a girl he decided. A girl with all her mother's beauty, her mother's thick black hair, her mother's wide brown eyes. A little girl, plump, with chubby limbs and fat little hands. She would play with the Venusian doll, the only little girl on Earth to have such a toy, and later, when she was big, they would talk together and he would tell her of all the strange and distant places to be found among the glowing stars.

The heliocab tilted a little, the spinning vanes slowing as it slanted to lose altitude, then hovered, the vanes whirling in a shimmer of glory as the blades caught and reflected the light from the setting sun. A light flared from the control tower of the public landing strip, then, softly as a piece of thistledown, the heliocab descended to the wide ribbon of concrete below.

John had left the tiny cabin almost before the cab had stopped. He thrust money at the pilot, then turned and almost ran towards the exit, his legs pounding at the concrete and his breath rasping through his nose.

"Hey.!"

John didn't stop.

"Hey, you there, don't you want this?"

The pilot leaned half-out of his cabin, a little thing in his hand, a thing of carved wood and brilliant feathers. He waved it at John, a smile creasing the corners of his mouth. "You forgot this, don't you want it?"

"Thanks." John ran back to the heliocab and took the doll. "Thanks a lot."

"Forget it." The pilot stared at him. "You feel all right?"

"Yes."

"You don't look it."

"I'm all right," snapped John impatiently, then was ashamed of his too-sharp tone. "Being overdoing things a bit," he explained weakly. "A good night's rest will fix me up. Thanks again."

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"That's O.K. I've got kids of my own." The pilot grinned, waved a casual salute, then lifted his cab on whirling blades and headed towards the parking area. John tucked the doll firmly beneath his arm and forced himself to walk towards the exit. His head ached and he felt the protest of overstrained muscles. His joints burned and his skin felt dry and hot as though from incipient fever, and he knew that he had to use caution or be laid up with strained ligaments.

He took a turbine cab home.

The house was in darkness, the dying light of the ending day reflecting from the blank windows in showers of red and gold, crimson and orange, giving a deceptive air of gaiety to the silent dwelling. He thumbed the doorbell, then, realising that no one could be at home, tried the door. It opened, and his nose wrinkled at a musty odour, a smell of stale air and stale smoke, of dust and the lingering traces of rotting food. Alarm stabbed at him, and he thrust the door wide, switching on the hall lights, and calling a familiar name.

"Norma!"

Silence, and the ghost whispers of dulled echoes.

"Norma! Are you at home!"

He stood for a moment in the hall, listening, listening for a baby's cry, for the sounds of a woman busy at her work, for the music of a teleradio or the low hum of conversation.

He heard nothing.

The house was still, as silent as though it had never been lived in, the glossy surfaces of the furniture seeming as remote as that in a shop window. Slowly he closed the door behind him, not even wondering why it had been unlocked, and moved from the hall into the living room.

It was dark and empty, and he blinked beneath the brilliance of the lights as he closed the circuit. He frowned as he stared about the big room, feeling uneasy, uncomfortable, and yet not knowing why. Slowly he drew a finger over the littered top of a polished table, staring at the trail he had made in the dust, staring at the stale biscuits on dusty plates, the sticky glasses, some marred with lipstick, others bearing the imprints of masculine hands. Ash trays overflowed, spilling butts and grey powder on to the stained carpet and the once-gleaming surfaces of table and sideboards were dark with cigarette burns.

The kitchen was even worse.

Dirty plates filled the sink, and the door of the refrigerator gaped on spoiled food and empty compartments. Empty bottles littered the floor, and the pulp and skins of various citrus fruits reeked in an

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unemptied garbage container. He stooped and picked up one of the empty bottles, reading the gaudy label, his nose wrinkling to an unfamiliar smell. He dropped it, letting it fall from his hand to smash against the floor, and now he knew what the disorder reminded him of.

The morning after the night before.

He had been to parties, had even thrown some during his brief periods home, and he remembered just how the house had looked afterwards, the filled ashtrays, the empty bottles, the general air of disruption and disorder. That had been bad, but not too bad—this . . .

His mouth tightened in disgust, and anger replaced the gnawing worry and doubt. Savagely he moved from room to room, switching on the lights, staring at the untidiness, the dust, the general air of neglect. He searched the ground floor, then climbed painfully up the stairs to the bedrooms. One of them had been converted to a nursery, the walls papered with brightly coloured animals and Nursery Land Folk, fat little men and jolly Gnomes, Elves, Pixies, sitting on swollen toadstools, talking to rabbits and playing with wide-winged buttterflies.

A cot stood in one corner, a delicate thing of smooth plastic and gossamer lace, and he crossed over to it, half-afraid to look inside, yet feeling his stomach tighten with excited anticipation as he stooped over the rim.

It was empty.

The little pillow was unmarked, the counterpane, the string of baby beads and a tiny rattle. All brand new. All bought with loving care and high hope. All unused.

Something burned in his eyes and the fear and worry came back, replacing the anger and churning his stomach with unspoken grief. He left the room, the bright wallpaper and the silent cot, and his feet thudded on the pile of the soft carpeting as he moved from room to room.

In one of them he found his wife.

She lay sprawled on an unmade bed, her mouth open, her hair a black cloud of disorder, her skirt soiled and twisted about her silken knees. One shoe had falled from her foot and the stocking had laddered, the wide trail writhing like a pale snake up her calf and over her knee. Make-up showed like a mask on her lax features, the red stain of her lipstick grotesque against her ghastly pallor and her hands seemed like blood-tipped talons as they rested on the crumpled sheets.

At first he thought she was dead, and despair softened his muscles so that he almost fell. Then he stooped over her, his nose wrinkling to an acrid odour, and disgust took the place of despair as he realised

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the truth.

She was drunk.

For a long moment he stood, staring down at her, fighting the weakness of reaction and trying to bring order out of terrible chaos.

Norma was drunk. He had never seen her drunk before, she had rarely touched alcohol and her own pride and self-respect would have prevented her from ever getting into such a helpless condition. She was drunk—*but where was the baby*?

He shouted at her, shaking her and trying to force her to answer the question. He failed. She stirred a little, muttered something, and rolled over on her side. Beneath her he caught a glimpse of something white, a scrap of intricate knitting, a tiny woollen garment, hand made, even clumsily made, a garment for a new-born baby, and looking at it, he knew that the comatose woman on the bed had knitted it.

Grimly he set about sobering her up.

He staggered from the bathroom to the bedroom, carrying a great bowl of water, throwing it over her, refilling it, throwing it again. The bed became a sopping ruin, the sheets wringing wet, the carpets dark with oozing moisture, welling and squelching beneath his water-filled shoes.

He slapped her face, her hands, tugging at her hair and pulling her limp body so that she lolled on the edge of the bed. Slowly, very slowly, life returned to the alcohol-soaked body, awareness dawned on her lax features, her eyelids fluttered, opened, closed, opened again.

"Norma! Wake up, Norma! Norma!"

He shook her until her head rolled on her shoulders, until her hands lifted in instinctive self-defence, until her eyes registered something other than dull, animal-like consciousness.

He dragged her to the shower then, thrusting her into the cubicle, still fully dressed, and turned on the ice-cold needle spray. He spun the control valve until the pressure spray stung her with a thousand whips, then fumbled in the medicine cabinet for tablets and pills, guessing which would be best to use, then carelessly forcing her to swallow a mixture of them all.

He ran down to the kitchen, rummaging through the mess until he found coffee and the percolator. He filled it, ladling in heaped spoonfuls of the brown grains, and set it over an electric coil to boil. He climbed the stairs, wincing to the forgotten pain of his abused muscles, and dragging her from the lashing spray, stripped off her ruined clothes and rubbed her savagely with a rough towel. She

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began to cry, thrusting at his violent hands, and he snarled at her, slapping at her fingers, concentrating on getting her sober, closing his ears to her whimpered protests and weak struggles.

By the time he had dressed her in a loose house coat and got her downstairs he was weak from exertion and dripping with sweat.

But his wife was sober.

He watched her as she drank two cups of black coffee, sipping at his own cup, his mouth rebelling at the bitter taste of the strong liquid. He watched her as his presence began to register, the fact that he was home, that he was her husband, the fact that he had found her sodden drunk and the house looking like a pigsty with dust and neglect.

Somehow it didn't seem to worry her, and sudden anger made him slam the cup down on the table.

"Well, Norma?"

"Well?"

"You know what I mean," he snapped. "All this," he gestured towards the disordered house, "can wait. Where is the baby?"

"Gone." She said the word without feeling, without emotion, as if it were something abstract, unimportant, unreal.

"I can see that, but where? Where is she?"

"She?" For the first time life seemed to return to her, and her eyes softened as she traced an aimless design on the tabletop. "How did you know it was a girl?"

"I didn't—I guessed." He forced himself to be gentle, to restrain his impatience, and the knuckles of his hands gleamed white through the skin as he gripped the arms of the chair. "Where is she, Norma?"

"I told you, she's gone."

"I know that, but where?"

"Where?" Slowly she shook her head and her eyes stared past him, stared through the walls of the house towards the distant glory of the burning stars. "I don't know, John. With the angels perhaps. Where do babies go when they . . ." Something seemed to catch in her throat, something which made her eyes glisten with tears and set her lips quivering, her voice to breaking.

"*When they what?*"

"Please, John, don't make me say it. She's gone. Isn't that bad enough? Gone I tell you. Gone!"

"You mean that she's dead?" He stared at her in shocked unbelief, his hearth thudding with sickening violence against his ribs, his mouth dry with sudden hate.

"You dirty stinking drunken bitch! You killed her!"

The sound of his hand against her cheek echoed through the silent house.

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The blow seemed to have finished what the water, the drugs and the coffee had begun, and when the initial shock had died, she was wholly sober. She touched her cheek, the mark of his fingers standing out against the pallid skin in ugly welts, then stared at her hand as if expecting to see it covered with blood. Then she stared at him and her eyes held an emotion he had never expected to see again.

Contempt.

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It hurt. It hurt because he felt it undeserved, but at the same time he felt a stab of shame that he had slapped an unsuspecting woman, and the contempt in her eyes served to trigger his own self-dislike. He rubbed his tingling fingers, and sought refuge in bluster and accusation.

"Look at the place! Filthy! What baby could be expected to live with a sot for a mother." He saw the anguish in her eyes and knew that he was hurting her far more than the blow had done, but something within him, something born of fear and doubt and nagging worry, forced him to continue.

"So she died, and then what did you do, throw a party to celebrate?"

"Don't." She stared at him, her wide brown eyes pits of torment against the whiteness of her face. "How could you think like that? How could you?"

"Isn't it true?" He stared at the cluster of empty bottles, at the unwashed dishes and the dust and dirt. "Are you proud of your kitchen, Norma. Did your friends heve a good time?"

"So I've had a few drinks." He recoiled from the sudden feral anger blazing from her eyes, from the anger which made her voice a brittle mockery of what it should have been. "So what? What did you want me to do while you were away, sit on my hands, say prayers for your safety? Haven't I a life of my own to live? Who are you to tell me what to do?"

"I'm your husband, the father of your child, or have you forgotten that?"

"No." She looked at him, and now the contempt was back in her eyes and her lips curled with the same emotion. "I haven't forgotten, how could I forget, I have an empty cradle to remind me of the *man* I married."

"Is that my fault, the empty cradle I mean—is it?"

"Yes."

He rose with a savage abruptness, sending his chair skittering over the polished floor, and his fingers dug into her shoulders as if they were hooks.

"What do you mean? Quick, tell me. How did the baby die?"

"Don't you know?" She stared at him, and though he gripped her with all the strength of arm and wrist muscles, yet she betrayed no feeling of pain.

"How can I know? Tell me."

"She died almost as soon as she was born, and I almost died with her, that's what you've done for your family."

"I've done?" He stepped back, shaking his head in puzzled bewilderment. "I don't understand. The baby died at birth, I

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can realise that, but why blame me? I was miles away, out in space, what could I have done to prevent it?"

"You could have been here, a wife likes to know that her man is beside her at a time like that. I needed you then, John, needed you more than I have ever done, more than I ever will do, and you weren't there. I had to rely on strangers, friends, employees of the hospital, they were kind enough but it wasn't the same, it wasn't anywhere near the same."

"But you knew that would happen the last time I was home. You told me not to worry, that you would manage. What made you change?"

She shrugged, toying with her empty coffee cup, her thick black hair falling in disarranged coils over the whiteness of her shoulders. She seemed remote, disinterested, almost like a stranger, and he felt a barrier between them which had not existed before.

"Norma!"

"Yes?"

"Look, Norma, perhaps I made a mistake, I'm sorry, I shouldn't have slapped you, but I was worried. I've looked forward to seeing the baby for so long and the disappointment was too great." He tried to touch her, to rest his hand on her shoulder, but she pulled away, and he sat down, biting his lips. "I'm sorry about the baby, you know that, but Norma, why have you changed?"

"Have I?"

"Yes. You don't seem at all pleased to see me, and Norma, even if the baby did die, we can always have another."

"No!"

"Why not?" He stared at her, not understanding the expression on her face, not liking it, feeling that somehow no woman should ever look at her husband in quite that way.

"I'll tell you why not." Her mouth twisted as she almost spat the words, sending them like bullets into the quivering surface of his self-importance. "You can't have a baby, that's why! You're not man enough to father a child and you never will be. Look at you! My God! What made me marry such an apology of a man. I must have been a starry-eyed fool, blinded with the glamour of marrying a rocket pilot, and I thought the reflected glory would be compensation enough. Well, I was wrong. Nothing can compensate for a husband who isn't a husband, who is just someone who comes home for a few days each year, who has to be nursed and babied, shielded and apologised for. Not even the money you give me can compensate for that empty cradle upstairs. I'm a normal woman, not a freak, and I want a normal husband and normal babies. I don't want you, you . . ."

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The chiming of the doorbell merged with her sudden tears.

Bill Larrimer stood on the step, his wife Mary with him, and staring at them John felt a sick envy. They were both normal, well-matched, with three healthy childern and had found contentment in each other's company. He stared at them, and Bill shuffled his feet, clearing his throat with a nervousness surprising in so large a man.

"Hello, John. We'd have arrived sooner but the prop shaft of our turbine car snapped and we had to wait for transport." He hesitated, glancing over John's shoulder into the house. "May we come in?"

"I suppose so." John stood back and let them enter the house. Mary disappeared towards the kitchen and John would have followed her but Bill caught his arm and drew him into the living room.

"I want to talk to you, John. Have you seen Norma?"

"I have."

"Was she . . .?" Bill flushed, fumbling for words.

"She was drunk," said John bitterly. "You can see what the place is like for yourself."

"I know, that's what I wanted to talk to you about." The big man glanced around the littered room, then sat down on the edge of a settee. "Sit down, John, you look tired."

John nodded and slumped down beside the big man. He was tired, his muscles burned with fatigue and his legs quivered, threatening to collapse beneath him at any moment. He rested his hands on his knees, trying to stop their trembling, and his mouth felt gritty and full of slime.

"Do you know about the baby, John?"

"She told me."

"Norma?"

"Who else? You didn't seem to want to."

"I know, John, I'm sorry about that, but we'd hoped to get here before you." The big man sighed, then braced himself as if for an unpleasant task. "I was at the hospital when she was born. Norma needed a friend and I've known her nearly all my life. She had a bad time, John, very bad, she almost died and at one time they feared for her sanity."

"So?"

"So things aren't quite the same as when you left." He sighed again, deliberately staring at the silent bulk of the teleradio cabinet. "I'll make this short, John. I don't like what I'm doing."

"Then get on with it."

"I will. Norma wants a divorce, John, and you've got to let her have it."

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"A divorce?" John stared at the big man. "Are you serious? Do you know what you're saying? I just can't give her up like that, she means too much to me, we mean too much to each other, you must be making a mistake."

"No, John. I wish I were, but I'm not. Norma must end this marriage, for the sake of both of you." He paused and gestured towards the littered room. "This is just a beginning, John, can you guess what will follow?"

He nodded, knowing what the big man was getting at. When a woman was good, she was perfect, but when she was bad . . . A woman like Norma knew no half-way mark, with her it was all or none, and if she had lost her self-respect, then life with her would be a continuous nightmare.

First the drinking, the wild parties, the dull coma induced by too much alcohol. Then the moral fibre would slip, drugs, strange men, any sort of a man, and the shrill forced laughter of a damned soul trying to justify a mode of life foreign to her nature. If a divorce could save her then it was a small price to pay, but . . .?

"She wants children, John. Babies she can mother and nurse and watch grow into healthy children. She must have them, John, her whole nature cries out for them, and without them . . ." He shrugged, staring at the disordered room.

"I can give her that," John stared down at his trembling hands. "I can give her babies, I want them just as much as she does you know, she doesn't have to get a divorce, we can still be happy together."

"No, John."

"No? What do you mean?"

"You can't give her children. You've been in space too long, it was a miracle that she ever conceived and after your last trip it would be an impossibility. You're sterile, John, the radiations of space have destroyed you as a parent. Norma must marry a normal man if she is to regain her moral sanity."

"You're lying!"

"No. I'm not lying. Your child was a girl, did you know that? But it was something else too. It was an unsuccessful mutation, John, a freak, it was a mercy that it died." He glanced pityingly down at the man at his side, resting one big hand on the pilot's shoulder, feeling the muscles jump and quiver beneath his palm.

"I'm sorry, John, damn sorry, but that's the way it is."

He didn't answer, he was staring through a film of tears at the ruin of a broken life.

It had always been the same. At school, at work, then later at the academy, it had always been the same. At first, when he had been

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accepted as a spaceman, things had been different. The rocket ships were still new and the men who rode between the planets on wings of flame were heroes, but it didn't last, it never lasted.

When he had married, when he had a beautiful woman to call his own, one who loved and respected him, then it had seemed that he would know real contentment. For three years now he had known that happiness, when life was a series of bright spots between the lonely journeys, and home was where his wife waited to welcome him. But now . . .

He rose from the settee, stumbling a little as he headed towards the kitchen. Mary stared at him as he entered, then, moved by some womanly intuition, left him alone with his wife.

"Norma." He moved towards her, his hands outstretched, his eyes like those of an injured animal. "Bill has just told me about the baby. I'm sorry, more sorry than you can ever know. Can you forgive me, dear?"

"For what?"

"For the things I said, the blow, the insults. I didn't know, and I'd looked forward so much to seeing the baby . . ." His voiced trailed into silence as he saw the expression in her eyes.

"Did he say anything else?"

"He told me that you wanted a divorce. Is that true?"

"Yes."

"Can't you think it over? Wait for another trip? Maybe we could adopt a child, more than one if you like, anything to make you happy, but don't leave me, Norma. Please don't leave me."

"It's no good, John." For a moment pity replaced the contempt in her eyes and she touched him gently on the head. "I can't live like this any longer. I want a man who can be a husband to me, take me out, take me dancing, swimming, walking, all the things we could never do. It isn't that I hate you, John, it's just that . . ."

"You want a man instead of a freak." He nodded, and his legs felt as if they were made of water as he headed for the stairs. Slowly he entered the nursery, the room with the bright wallpaper and the accusing emptiness of the lonely cot. He stooped over it, staring at where the baby should have been, then recoiled with an insane hope.

Something stared up at him from the tiny pillow. A little thing, carved from exotic woods, plumed and tufted with brilliant feathers and with tiny gems for eyes.

The Venusian doll.

He picked it up, staring at the cunning perfection of the joints, the oddly grin on the lopsided face, and in his hand he held all the bitter hope and unsatisfied longing of the barren years. A doll. His

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dead baby's doll. Brought across limitless distance to mock him with what might have been.

He threw it to the floor, stamping on it, smashing the cunning joints and soiling the gay feathers. He pounded the face with his heel, forcing the gems from their sockets and leaving the toy sightless and blind. He kicked at it, the tears streaming down his face, the sound of his foot as it met the wood a dull accompaniment to his thudding heart.

Then, because there was nothing else he could do, he went out into the night, out beneath the cold stars, the fairy trails of strat-rockets, and the cold night air.

All forty five inches of him.

E. C. Tubb

Southport Interplanetary Society

An extremely progressive and enthusiastic group of people now meet regularly in the Y.M.C.A., Eastbank Street, for discussions, lectures and the dissemination of astronautics in general. They particularly welcome new members with fresh viewpoints and are planning a small regular Journal. Readers desiring further information should write to the Chairman, Mr. G. B. Clarke, 60 Heathey Lane, Shirley Hill, Nr. Ormskirk, Lancs.

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It is a pleasure to be able to present a new short story by C. M. Kornbluth so soon after the success of his recent serial "Takeoff." In this little gem the author moves his central character forward in time and creates a most entertaining situation.

DOMINOES

By C. M. Kornbluth

"Money!" his wife screamed at him. "You're killing yourself, Will. Pull out of the market and let's go some place where we can live like human—"

He slammed the apartment door on her reproaches and winced, standing in the carpeted corridor, as an ulcer twinge went through him. The elevator door rolled open and the elevator man said, beaming: "Good morning, Mr. Born. It's a lovely day today."

"I'm glad, Sam," W. J. Born said sourly. "I just had a lovely, lovely breakfast." Sam didn't know how to take it, and compromised by giving him a meagre smile.

"How's the market look, Mr. Born?" he hinted as the car stopped on the first floor. "My cousin told me to switch from Lunar Entertainment, he's studying to be a pilot, but the *Journal* has it listed for growth."

W. J. Born grunted: "If I knew I wouldn't tell you. You've got no business in the market. Not if you think you can play it like a dice-table."

He fumed all the way through his taxi ride to the office. Sam, a million Sams, had no business in the market. But they were in, and they had built up the Great Boom of 1975 on which W. J. Born Associated was coasting merrily along. For how long? His ulcer twinged again at the thought.

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He arrived at 9.15. Already the office was a maelstrom. The clattering tickers, blinking boards and racing messengers spelled out the latest, hottest word from markets in London, Paris, Milan, Vienna. Soon New York would chime in, then Chicago, then San Francisco.

Maybe this would be the day. Maybe New York would open on a significant decline in Moon Mining and Smelting. Maybe Chicago would nervously respond with a slump in commodities and San Francisco's Utah Uranium would plummet in sympathy. Maybe panic in the Tokyo Exchange on the heels of the alarming news from the States—panic relayed across Asia with the rising sun to Vienna, Milan, Paris, London and crashing like a shock wave-into the opening New York market again.

Dominoes, W. J. Born thought. A row of dominoes. Flick one and they all topple in a heap. Maybe this would be the day.

Miss Illig had a dozen calls from his personal crash-priority clients pencilled in on his desk pad already. He ignored them and said into her good-morning smile: " Get me Mr. Loring on the phone."

Loring's phone rang and rang while W. J. Born boiled inwardly. But the lab was a barn of a place, and when he was hard at work he was deaf and blind to distractions. You had to hand him that. He was screwy, he was insolent, he had an inferiority complex that stuck out a yard, but he was a worker.

Loring's insolent voice said in his ear: " Who's this?"

" Born," he snapped. " How's it going?"

There was a long pause, and Loring said casually: " I worked all night. I think I got it licked."

" What do you mean?"

Very irritated: " I said I think I got it licked. I sent a clock and a cat and a cage of white mice out for two hours. They came back okay."

" You mean—" W. J. Born began hoarsely, and moistened his lips. " How many years?" he asked evenly.

" The mice didn't say, but I think they spent two hours in 1977."

" I'm coming right over," W. J. Born snapped, and hung up. His office staff stared as he strode out.

If the man was lying—! No; he didn't lie. He'd been sopping up money for six months, ever since he bulled his way into Born's office with his time machine project, but he hadn't lied once. With brutal frankness he had admitted his own failures and his doubts that the thing ever would be made to work. But now, W. J. Born rejoiced, it had turned into the smartest gamble of his career. Six months and a quarter of a million dollars—a two-year forecast on the market was worth a billion! Two hours to learn when the Great

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Bull Market of 1975 would collapse and then back to his office armed with the information, ready to buy up to the very crest of the boom and then get out at the peak, wealthy forever, forever beyond the reach of fortune, good or bad!

He stumped upstairs to Loring's loft in the West 70's.

Loring was badly overplaying the role of casual roughneck. Gangling redheaded, and unshaved, he grinned at Born and said: "Watcha think of soy futures, W. J.? Hold or switch?"

W. J. Born began automatically: "If I knew I wouldn't—oh, don't be silly. Show me the confounded thing."

Loring showed him. The whining generators were unchanged; the tall Van de Graaf accumulator still looked like something out of a third-rate horror movie. The thirty square feet of haywired vacuum tubes and resistances were still an incomprehensible tangle. But since his last visit a phone booth without a phone had been added. A sheet-copper disk set into its ceiling was connected to the machinery by a ponderous cable. Its floor was a slab of polished glass.

"That's it," Loring said. "I got it at a junkyard and fixed it up pretty. You want to watch a test on the mice?"

"No," W. J. Born said. "I want to try it myself. What do you think I've been paying you for?" He paused. "Do you guarantee its safety?"

"Look, W. J.," Loring said, "I guarantee nothing. I think this will send you two years into the future. I think if you're back in it at the end of two hours you'll snap back to the present. I'll tell you this, though. If it does send you into the future, you had better be back in it at the end of two hours. Otherwise you may snap back into the same space as a strolling pedestrian or a moving car—and an H-bomb will be out of your league."

W. J. Born's ulcer twinged. With difficulty he asked: "Is there anything else I ought to know?"

"Nope," Loring said after considering a moment. "You're just a paying passenger."

"Then let's go." W. J. Born checked to make sure that he had his memorandum book and smooth-working pen in his pocket and stepped into the telephone booth.

Loring closed the door, grinned, waved and vanished—literally vanished, while Born was looking at him.

Born yanked the door open and said: "Loring! What the devil—" And then he saw that it was late afternoon instead of early morning. That Loring was nowhere in the loft. That the generators were silent and the tubes dark and cold. That there was a mantle of dust and a faint musty smell.

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He rushed from the big room and down the stairs. It was the same street in the West 70's. Two hours, he thought, and looked at his watch. It said 9.55, but the sun unmistakably said it was late afternoon. Something had happened. He resisted an impulse to grab a passing high-school boy and ask him what year it was. There was a newsstand down the street, and Born went to it faster than he had moved in years. He threw down a dime and snatched a *Post*, dated—September 11th, 1977. He had done it.

Eagerly he riffled to the *Post's* meagre financial page. Moon Mining and Smelting had opened at 27. Uranium at 19. United Com at 24. Catastrophic lows ! The crash had come !

He looked at his watch again, in panic. Nine-fifty nine. It had said 9.55. He'd have to be back in the phone booth by 11.55 or—he shuddered. An H-bomb would be out of his league.

Now to pinpoint the crash. " Cab !" he yelled, waving his paper It eased to the curb. " Public Library," W. J. Born grunted, and leaned back to read the *Post* with glee.

The headline said: 2500 RIOT HERE FOR UPPED JOBLESS DOLE. Naturally; naturally. He gasped as he saw who had won the 1976 presidential election. Lord, what odds he'd be able to get back in 1975 if he wanted to bet on the nomination ! NO CRIME WAVE, SAYS COMMISSIONER. Things hadn't changed very much after all. BLONDE MODEL HACKED IN TUB; MYSTERY BOY-FRIEND SOUGHT. He read that one all the way through, caught by a two-column photo of the blonde model for a hosiery account. And then he noticed that the cab wasn't moving. It was caught in a rock-solid traffic jam. The time was 10.5.

" Driver," he said.

The man turned around, soothing and scared. A fare was a fare; there was a depression on. " It's all right, mister. We'll be out of here in a minute. They turn off the Drive and that blocks the avenue for a couple of minutes, that's all. We'll be rolling in a minute."

They were rolling in a minute, but for a few seconds only. The cab inched agonizingly along while W. J. Born twisted the newspaper in his hands. At 10.13 he threw a bill at the driver and jumped from the cab.

Panting he reached the library at 10.46 by his watch. By the time that the rest of the world was keeping on that day it was quitting-time in the mid-town offices. He had bucked a stream of girls in surprisingly short skirts and surprisingly big hats all the way.

He got lost in the marble immensities of the library and his own panic. When he found the newspaper room his watch said 11.03. W. J. Born panted to the girl at the desk: " File of the Stock Exchange Journal for 1975, and 1976 and 1977.

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"We have the microfilms for 1975 and 1976, sir and loose copies for this year."

"Tell me, "he said, "what year for the big crash? "That's what I want to look up."

"That's 1975, sir. Shall I get you that?"

"Wait," he said. "Do you happen to remember the month?"

"I think it was March or August or something like that, sir."

"Get me the whole file, please," he said. Nineteen seventy five. His year—his real year. Would he have a month? A week? Or—?

"Sign this card, mister," the girl was saying patiently. "There's a reading machine, you just go sit there and I'll bring you the spool."

He scribbled his name and went to the machine, the only one vacant in a row of a dozen. The time on his watch was 11.05. He had fifty minutes.

The girl dawdled over cards at her desk and chatted with a good-looking young page with a stack of books while sweat began to pop from Born's brow. At last she disappeared into the stacks behind her desk.

Born waited. And waited. And waited. Eleven-ten. Eleven-fifteen. Eleven-twenty.

An H-bomb would be out of his league.

His ulcer stabbed him as the girl appeared again, daintily carrying a spool of 35-millimeter film between thumb and forefinger, smiling brightly at Born. "Here we are," she said, and inserted the spool in the machine and snapped a switch. Nothing happened.

"Oh, darn," she said. "The light's out. I told the electrician."

Born wanted to scream and then to explain, which would have been just as foolish.

"There's a free reader," she pointed down the line. W. J. Born's knees tottered as they walked to it. He looked at his watch—11.27. Twenty-eight minutes to go. The ground glass screen lit up with a shadow of the familiar format; January 1st, 1975. "You just turn the crank," she said and showed him. The shadows spun past on the screen at dizzying speed, and she went back to her desk.

Born cranked the film up to April, 1975, the month he had left 91 minutes ago, and to the sixteenth day of April, the very day he had left. The shadow on the ground glass was the same paper he had seen that morning: SYNTHETICS SURGE TO NEW VIENNA PEAK.

Trembling he cranked into a vision of the future; the Stock Exchange Journal for April 17th, 1975.

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Three-inch type screamed: SECURITIES CRASH IN GLOBAL CRISES: BANKS CLOSE; CLIENTS STORM BROKERAGES !

Suddenly he was calm, knowing the future and safe from its blows. He rose from the reader and strode firmly into the marble halls. Everything was all right now. Twenty-six minutes was time enough to get back to the machine. He'd have a jump of several hours on the market; his own money would be safe as houses; he could get his personal clients off the hook.

He got a cab with miraculous ease and rolled straight to the loft building in the West 70's without hindrance. At 1150. by his watch he was closing the door of the phone booth in the dusty, musty-smelling lab.

At 11.54 he noticed an abrupt change in the sunlight that filtered through the dirt-streaked windows and stepped calmly out. It was April 17th, 1975, again. Loring was sound asleep beside a gas hotplate on which coffee simmered. W. J. Born turned off the gas and went downstairs softly. Loring was a screwy, insolent, insecure young man, but by his genius he had enabled W. J. Born to harvest his fortune at the golden moment of perfection.

Back in his office he called his floor broker and said firmly: " Cronin, get this straight. I want you to sell every share of stock and every bond in my personal account immediately, at the market, and to require certified checks in payment."

Cronin asked forthrightly: " Chief, have you gone crazy?"

" I have not. Don't waste a moment, and report regularly to me. Get your boys to work. Drop everything else."

Born had a light, bland lunch sent in and refused to see anybody or take any calls except from the floor broker. Cronin kept reporting that the dumping was going right along, that Mr. Born must be crazy, that the unheard-of demand for certified checks was causing alarm, and finally, at the close, that Mr. Born's wishes were being carried out. Born told him to get the checks to him immediately.

They arrived in an hour, drawn on a dozen New York Banks. W. J. Born called in a dozen senior messengers, and dealt out the checks, one bank to a messenger. He told them to withdraw the cash, rent safe-deposit boxes of the necessary sizes in those banks where he did not already have boxes, and deposit the cash.

He then phoned the banks to confirm the weird arrangement. He was on first-name terms with at least one vice president in each bank, which helped enormously.

W. J. Born leaned back, a happy man. Let the smash come. He turned on his flashboard for the first time that day. The New York closing was sharply off. Chicago was worse. San Francisco was shaky

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—as he watched, the flashing figures on the composite price index at San Francisco began to drop. In five minutes it was a screaming nosedive into the pit. The closing bell stopped it short of a catastrophe.

W. J. Born went out to dinner after phoning his wife that he would not be home. He returned to the office and watched a board in one of the outer rooms that carried Tokyo Exchange through the night hours, and congratulated himself as the figures told a tale of panic and ruin. The dominoes were toppling, toppling, toppling.

He went to his club for the night and woke early, eating alone in an almost-deserted breakfast room. The ticker in the lobby sputtered a good-morning as he drew on his gloves against the chilly April dawn. He stopped to watch. The ticker began spewing a tale of disaster on the great bourses of Europe, and Mr. Born walked to his office. Brokers a-plenty were arriving early, muttering in little crowds in the lobby and elevators.

"What do you make of it, Born?" one of them asked.

"What goes up must come down," he said. "I'm safely out."

"So I hear," the man told him, with a look that Born decided was envious.

Vienna, Milan, Paris and London were telling their sorry story on the boards in the customers' rooms. There were a few clients silting up the place already, and the night staff had been busy taking orders by phone for the opening. They all were to sell at the market.

W. J. Born grinned at one of the night men and cracked a rare joke: "Want to buy a brokerage house, Willard?"

Willard glanced at the board and said: "No thanks, Mr. Born. But it was nice of you to keep me in mind."

Most of the staff drifted in early; the sense of crisis wash eavy in the air. Born instructed his staff to do what they could for his personal clients first, and holed up in his office.

The opening bell was the signal for hell to break loose. The tickers never had the ghost of a chance of keeping up with the crash, unquestionably the biggest and steepest in the history of finance. Born got some pleasure out of the fact that his boys' promptness had cut the losses of his personal clients a little. A very important banker called in midmorning to ask Born into a billion-dollar pool that would shore up the market by a show of confidence. Born said no, knowing that no show of confidence would keep Moon Mining and Smelting from opening at 27 on September 11, 1977. The banker hung up abruptly.

Miss Illig asked: "Do you want to see Mr. Loring? He's here."

"Send him in."

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Loring was deathly pale, with a copy of the *Journal* rolled up in his fist. "I need some money," he said.

W. J. Born shook his head. "You see what's going on," he said. "Money's tight. I've enjoyed our association, Loring, but I think it's time to end it. You've had a quarter of a million dollars clear; I make no claims on your process—"

"It's gone," Loring said hoarsely. "I haven't paid for the damn equipment—not ten cents on the dollar yet. I've been playing the market. I lost a hundred and fifty thousand on soy features this morning. They'll dismantle my stuff and haul it away. I've got to have some money."

"No!" W. J. Born barked. "Absolutely not!"

"They'll come with a truck for the generators this afternoon. I stalled them. My stocks kept going up. And now—all I wanted was enough in reserve to keep working. I've got to have the money."

"No," said Born. "After all, its not my fault."

Loring's ugly face was close to his. "Isn't it?" he snarled. And he spread out the paper on the desk.

Born read the headline—again—of the Stock Exchange *Journal* for April 17th, 1975: SECURITIES CRASH IN GLOBAL CRISIS: BANKS CLOSE; CLIENTS STORM BROKERAGES! But this time he was not too rushed to read on: "A world-wide slump in securities has wiped out billions of paper dollars since it started shortly before closing yesterday at the New York Stock Exchange. No end to the catastrophic flood of sell orders is yet in sight. Veteran New York observers agreed that dumping of securities on the New York market late yesterday by W. J. Born of W. J. Born Associates pulled the plug out of the big boom which must now be consigned to memory. Banks have been hard hit-by the—"

"Isn't it?" Loring snarled. "Isn't it?" His eyes were crazy as he reached for Born's thin neck.

Dominoes, W. J. Born thought vaguely through the pain, and managed to hit a button on his desk. Miss Illig came in and screamed and went out again and came back with a couple of husky brokers' men, but it was too late.

C. M. Kornbluth

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Rules and Regulations are irksome things to endure when one is young and hot-headed. Usually they have been devised by older people after much trial and error as being the safest methods of giving maximum results with the widest margin of safety. Usually they are worth following.

REGULATIONS

By Richard Varne

Illustrated by HUNTER

The ten light-second buzz sounded from the speaker that was set in the featureless metal wall of the sleeping cubicle. Forbes ignored it, and dragged at the sweet-smelling cigarette he was smoking. Smith will be there, he thought, He's the stickler for the Regs. He blew out a cloud of cigarette smoke, and settled himself more comfortably on the acceleration bunk, letting his mind toy aimlessly with all the pleasant things that he would do if he picked up a bonus on this trip.

The five light second-warning came, and Forbes sighed heavily, then swung his legs from the bunk and stood up. He ran a hand through his red hair with an abrupt motion and began to walk down the corridor that led to the control cabin, his heels hitting the metal floor with staccato clicks.

Smith was sitting at the control panel, watching the image of Two as it gradually became larger. He heard Forbes approaching and turned to watch the stocky little redhead strut into the cabin. To think I was like that once, he mused. Just at the cocky stage after you've done a couple of Surveys and got over the first nervousness. He waved a casual hand in greeting, then swung the gimbal-mounted chair round to the control panel again. Forbes came up and dropped an arm familiarly over Smith's shoulders, looking into the view plate.

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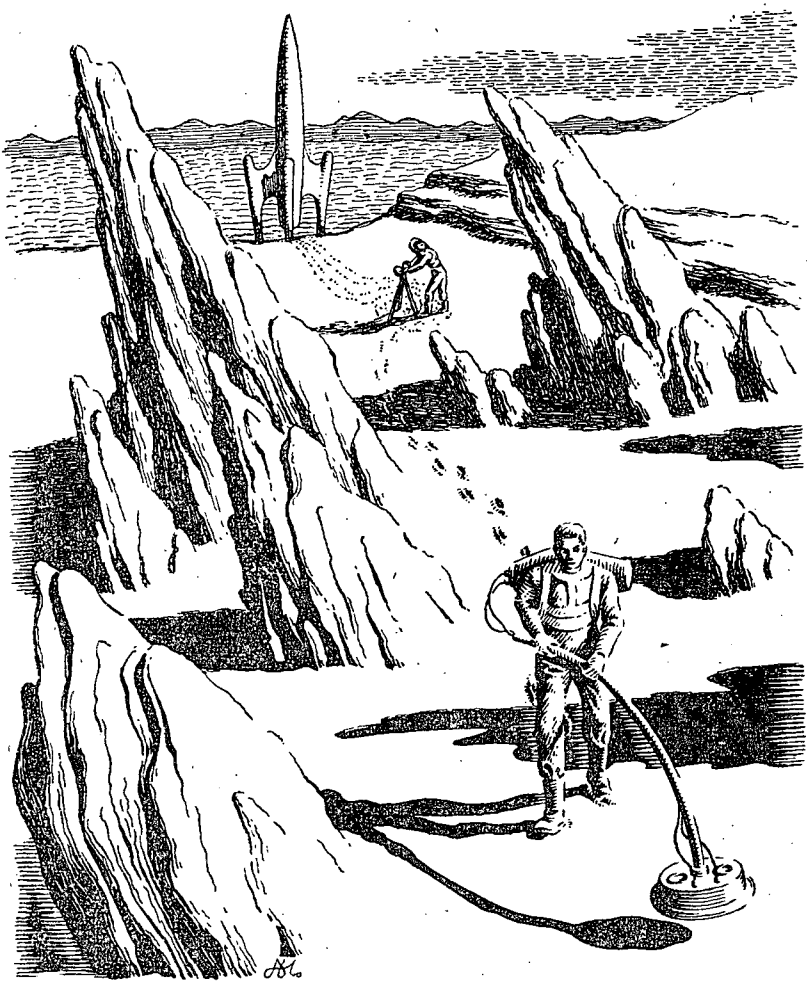

"Looks more promising than One did, doesn't it, Smithy," he said.

One was the first planet out from the giant red sun; it had been a hell of molten lead and zinc with no axial revolution, presenting first

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one side and then the other to the red giant as it swung round its incredibly close orbit. Even the Others would have left it alone, because it was no good to anybody; all the atmosphere had long since boiled away, and any metals were hopelessly alloyed.

Smith nodded without speaking; yes, he thought, this one does look more promising. Perhaps it would mean a bonus from Interstellar Survey that would add another few acres to the farm that he was buying on Beta Scorpii III.

He stared into the view plate at the planet, wondering what he would find there; somehow, he realised, he never lost the thrill that he had first felt when seeing the very differentness of the universe; perhaps he had got a bit more cautious in the forty years since his first Survey, but he hadn't become bored. And now, before he had realised it, he had reached his last Survey. After this one, he would be retired and given a free passage to any world he chose to spend the remaining landlubber years of his life, for space is a young man's hunting ground.

The surveyship went into a spiral reconnaisance orbit around Two, and Smith set the instruments that made the preliminary observations, plotting the main shapes of the continents and making an analysis of the atmosphere. Forbes was lying back in the other control chair, smoking his scented cigarette and pretending to be bored. Smith smiled inwardly when he noticed that the paper of the cigarette was being crumpled under nervous fingers.

Two lay below them like a yellow pool, the oceans were a dirty ochre colour and the land masses seemed barren yellow-and-grey wastes.

Forbes pursed his lips and let a dribble of smoke come from his nostrils. "Doesn't look too promising," he grunted. "Look at that yellow sea."

"Could be seaweed." said Smith.

The young man nodded. "Yes," he said. "I've seen more improbable things."

Smith bent forward to the dials and studied them to hide the twinkle in his eye. He read off the main constituents of the atmosphere.

"Nitrogen, forty per cent. Oxygen, thirty per cent. Carbon dioxide's a bit high . . . six per cent. Ten per cent of helium. The rest is inert." He looked up. "Substantially Earth-type."

Forbes lifted his shoulders in a quick shrug, "Those colonists will drop root on anything," he said. Then he leaned forward. "Put the radar screen on," he suggested. Smith threw a switch, and the view plate went hazy. All over the visible hemisphere, little shining

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patches of red light marked the radio-active ore areas. One blob near the shore of a yellow inlet of the sea was glowing like a nova.

Forbes whistled. "Just look at that," he breathed ecstatically. "A deposit of that size should be worth quite a bonus." He turned to Smith with an eager expression on his face. "Let's land now and take a look at it."

Smith wavered. "We should really take a look at the other hemisphere," he said, "but . . . all right then, we will."

A little while later, the surveyship dropped from orbit with a blast of the fore-jets, and dived towards the planet. It slid down into the stratosphere, and when the shrill hiss of the riven air had developed into a howl, Smith turned the ship onto its fins, and began to reduce the speed of the fall with short blasts from the main drive.

The surveyship entered the denser air of the troposphere and clouds began to slip by, swirling like tobacco smoke in the disturbance of the ship's passing.

Smith was worried. Regulations clearly said that the whole of a planet should be surveyed from a close observation orbit before landing was attempted, and although the Regs often seemed stupid and unnecessary, it was easy to forget that every Regulation had been drawn up to prevent a certain occurance from happening again. And he didn't want his last Survey spoiled by an incident which could have been avoided. Then he shrugged his shoulders, perhaps his forty years of surveying had made him too cautious. He glanced sideways at Forbes; the young redhead had an intense expression on his face that disappeared, when he saw Smith watching him, and changed to the customary disinterested one.

At ten thousand metres up, Smith reduced the speed of the descent to forty metres per second, and began to peer into the view plate. The radio-active deposit was somewhere among an area of granite outcrops which looked too rough to drop ship on but the near-by sea had an unusually wide beach and Smith decided to land there.

Forbes indicated the beach with a stubby finger, "I'd put her down there if I were you." Smith nodded but said nothing. Slowly he increased the thrust of the drive until the surveyship was hovering a hundred metres up on a pillar of flame that melted the golden sand beneath her to glass.

Smith lowered the ship gently. The fins sunk slightly into the yielding sand and the howl of the main drive ceased.

Smith looked through has helmet at the desolate scene around him as he and Forbes stood close to the ship, feeling solid sand under

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their feet again after a month in space. To his left there were dark grey granite outcrops humping jaggedly above the barren soil and wind-blown sand that stretched perhaps three kilometres to the base of a steep slope that marked the eroded edge of a continental platform. The dim and sinister light of the red sun that hung low in the sky cast dark shadows across the landscape. To Smith's right was the gently curving expanse of the sea, disturbed by a few small ripples, and far over the water Smith could see the other side of the inlet as a ragged line against the dull pink sky. A few miles out there were a couple of small islands.

The yellow colour of the sea was apparantly only visible when seen in depth from above. It was possibly sediment in suspension, although it could be algae or some sort of vegetable growth on the bottom.

Forbes squinted at the sun that shone sullenly just above the horizon.

"I think that we'll leave the radio-active deposit until tomorrow, Smithy, and take a walk up the beach before it gets dark," he announced.

Smith looked at the stocky figure quizzically. "Anything you say," he murmured. Forbes missed the slight sarcasm; he was looking up and down the beach with quick, birdlike movements of his head.

"You know that Regs say that you shouldn't leave the vicinity of the ship until the area has been checked clear of anything dangerous, don't you?" Smith asked gently.

"Yes, but who cares about them," said Forbes, contemptously.

"Well," said Smith, "I don't care to go myself, and I wouldn't want you to go by yourself."

Forbes smiled. "Getting old, Smithy?" he said with a slight barb to his tone. He turned on his heel, leaving a neat depression in the sand, and scrunched away up the beach. Smith stood for a moment with a slight anger inside him; then it cooled and he went over to the ship and climbed the ladder to the airlock. He could remember when he had thought of Regs like that, before he had realised that they were a barrier between him and theun known. But the very real usefulness of the Regulations was something that one had to find out for oneself, sooner or later.

When he had reached the airlock, he stood for a moment on the lip, straining his eyes in the dim red light. A long way up the beach, he could just make out the short figure of Forbes, walking with short, quick strides. Smith slowly swung round and opened the inner door of the airlock. He shut it softly behind him and there was the sound of his steps towards his sleep cubicle. There was a click of a closing door. Then silence.

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The next morning, the sun had only been up an hour when Smith and Forbes were standing again on the beach. This time, they were standing in a foot of water, for the surveyship had been landed below the high-tide mark and the sea had washed over the entire expanse of the beach.

It was cold through the atmosphere suits that the men were wearing, and Forbes began clapping his arms against his body in quick, sweeping movements to quicken the circulation of his blood. Smith looked at him curiously. On Forbes freckled face there was an expression of suppressed excitement; it had been there all the morning and Smith was certain that Forbes was waiting for a psychological moment to spring some sort of surprise.

Forbes shivered. "This planet's pretty cold, isn't it. We're nearly on the equator here, and even then, it's far colder than my home world. Do you think it's colonisable, Smithy?"

"It's colonisable, all right," said Smith. "I should think that Interstellar Survey will hand out a nice little bonus for this one."

Forbes rubbed his hands together in mock greed. "And if that radio-active deposit turns out to be workable, we'll be rolling in the old rocket-juice." He moved his legs slightly, and little ripples spread out in circles across the smooth surface of the shallow gradually receding water that lay about them, shining like a pool of blood in the light of the rising sun. There was silence for a moment, and Smith waited patiently for Forbes to spring his bombshell.

Forbes suddenly flipped back his helmet and breathed deeply. He gasped at the coolness of the air. "I've been waiting to do that," he said with satisfaction. "This stuff tastes like wine after that metallic muck that InterSurv put in our cans."

Smith didn't say anything. There might be harmful spores or floating fungi in the air, and then again, there might not. Forbes was definitely at the stage in character-development where he had begun to find his feet, and started to kick against the Regs because they represented restricting Authority. But it was natural, he thought, a man must have some sort of independance in his thoughts if he joins InterSurv, and it was bound to come out when he found himself beyond Civilisation-as-we-know-it.

"You know something, Smithy?" said Forbes. "When I was at Tech school, they told me that our surveyships were badly designed. Apparently, there's too much weight on the port side, and the ships always tilt to the left when you land them on soft ground." He fell silent. Smith didn't bother to mention that he'd found that out empirically, forty years before, when he had dropped ship for the first time. He'd landed it on a soft, sandy place, and the ship had

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looked like the Leaning Tower of Pisa, back in pre-United Europe times. The instructors had certainly given him hell for that! He smiled reminiscently.

Then he asked, "What was it like along the beach, by the way?"

"Much the same as this. But it's a funny thing, Smithy, the beach is only wide in this particular spot, and it only has a slope as shallow as this at this particular spot. When there is no bed-rock beneath a beach, you get a shelving beach, like it is up there." Forbes gestured up the beach. "So obviously, I thought, there must be bed-rock only under this particular section of beach, which would explain the greater width and shallower slope.

"Then I thought to myself; why should it just be at this particular place, because the geology is inconsistent with that idea."

Ah, thought Smith, we're getting to it!. Then Forbes veered off again.

"How much do our surveyships weigh, Smithy?"

"About a thousand tons, give or take a few."

"That's what I thought. So you can realise, Smithy, what a surprise it was to notice, as I walked back to the ship last night, that, when by all logic, she should be listing to port like a drunken spaceman and buried up to the main jet in sand, she was sitting sedately on top of the beach!"

Smith turned round and looked at the ship. The whole puzzle had been staring him right in the face, and he hadn't realised it.

They waited until the tide had entirely receded, and then Forbes began to dig with a length of metal-strutting that he had found in the ship.

As he worked, he spoke breathlessly. "I hope you didn't mind me spinning my little moment of glory out, but I knew we wouldn't be able to start work until the water had gone, and I was rather pleased that I'd spotted it. I was going to look last night, in the blast pit, but I thought there was something following me, and I didn't want to hang around." He shifted out another heap of wet sand. "And of course, this morning, the tide had come in, and the blast pit was filled up." He glanced over at the smooth, wet sand beneath the gaping orifice of the main jet.

When the hole was about half a metre deep, he came to a hard surface, and kneeled down and began to clear out the last few handfuls. There was a grey, stonelike material at the bottom, obviously artificial.

With a growing excitement, Smith took the length of strutting, and began to probe the sand around the ship, trying to find out how far the material extended. Rather to his surprise, it turned out to

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be quite small, a platform about fifty metres square, with straight edges, and set slightly transverse across the beach. At one side, he dug down while Forbes watched, and finally revealed the edge. It was about seven decimetres thick, and was resting on sand. The edges of the slab were still square and showed no erosive effects.

"It can't be very old," said Forbes. "The edges are uneroded."

"You are assuming that the material can be eroded."

"Well," said Forbes, "It's resting on top of sand, in any case. You aren't going to suggest that the rocks were worn down to sand above and beneath the slab. Why, that would take thousands of years and even that slab must show wear in that time!"

Smith looked at him. "If the race that laid this slab is the race that I think it is, anything is possible." He stood up from beside the hole with the edge of the slab visible in one side, stuck the length of strutting into the sand with one vicious lunge of his arm and walked away with Forbes trailing behind him, his short, red-topped body looking oddly like a terriers'. Behind them, the stave stood in the sand like a lonely memorial to the Others.

Smith paced slowly up and down the beach in front of the ship, his thin sandy hair rumpled. "Consider it logically," he said.

Forbes was leaning against the atmosphere-scorched metal of the surveyship, a slight sneer on his face. Smith caught sight of him, You were beginning to act naturally then, weren't you, Forbes. You added up some observations and made a clear deduction from them, and you were pleased. So you forgot your pose for a while, you took a lot of enjoyment out of telling me your solution and I began to know you, the real you. And we found something that we could work together on, and feel a bit companionable about. So you dropped back behind the force shield of your everlasting know-it-all pose.

"Consider it logically," he said, again. "Here we have a slab that couldn't have been laid down by a race indigenous to this planet, because there aren't any that could do it. If there were, we must have seen other constructions of theirs, because you can't evolve on a world to the stage where you can make platforms like that without leaving some traces of living.

"Any race that has interstellar travel has got to have mental processes that approximate ours, because the progression of events from the first shelter to the first spaceship is rather fixed. So this platform is something that we would have a use for. So what is it?"

"The foundation of some sort of building," suggested Forbes.

Smith considered for a moment. "Could be, but I don't think so. My idea is that it is something quite different, and, anyway,

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I would expect something more to remain than just the foundations, if it was a building.

"Before I tell you what I think it is, let me explain the thoughts that led up to my idea."

"Yes, teacher."

"Out of all the suns in this region, and out of all the planets of all those suns, and out of all the continents on all the planets of all those suns, isn't it rather curious that we should happen to drop our little tin can on a platform measuring only fifty metres square.

"Isn't it stretching the laws of probability to suppose that we should drop our ship and find a hidden platform against adds that would need a different set of numerals to express mathematically?"

"So what could attract both us and this other race to this one region on this rather desolate planet? And the answer is, of course, the radio-active ore. And in that case, what difficulty did we find when we wanted to land? We found that the only place to land was on the beach. And if that platform hadn't been there, I don't mind admitting that we'd have been half-buried in the sand by now."

Forbes said, "So you think that the platform was there to prevent the ships of that other race from sinking into the sand when they came to collect the ore. Well, if that's right, this race couldn't have been here so very long ago."

"Why?"

"Because there was sand beneath the platform which must be the original sand, and there isn't a great deal more on top of the platform."

"Yes," said Smith thoughfully. Then he stopped his pacing. "We'll have to get some qualified geologists and extra-terrestrial archeologists out here from Earth, because if this is the Others, it's important!"

"Why is it so important?" asked Forbes, pushing himself away from the metal flank of the surveyship, and taking a step forward with an intent, somehow greedy expression on his sharp-featured face. "Who are 'the Others?"

The Others.

The ones who had been there before.

The mighty people that no human had ever seen.

As Man leaped from the world that had spawned him, as Man flung the seed of humanity in flimsy metal pods towards the stars, as he rode the soaring rockets of the surveyships that mapped the frontier of the expanding sphere of human colonisation, everywhere he found that the Others had been there before him.

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As he spread out towards the rim, where the stars are scattered meagrely on the velvet darkness of space, and inwards towards the Galactic Heart where the black of space is in patches amongst the silver starclouds, everywhere he landed were the remnants of the Others.

A deserted colony, half wrecked by the twenty thousand years of aloneness; a twisted piece of machinery with an unknown purpose; a building that had outlasted the foundations beneath it; once, an area of natural geology that had been twisted into a shape that controlled the weather winds for a colony which had long since disappeared.

But nobody had ever seen the Others, their race had gone from the hard-won stars; perhaps to some mighty, unguessable destiny or, as some thought, the structure of their bodies had been unable to adjust to the inexorable Law of Entropy that had killed the dinosaurs of Earth's prehistory, and their cells could not emit vital energy.

The remains they left behind were vaguely human; at least, they had doors at ground level, and windows, and floors, but most races needed those. The size of the Others seemed to be approximately human, too, but the biologists said that any intelligent race would have to be roughly the size and shape of a man.

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And so men went out to the beckoning stars, and landed their ships in the ever growing bubble of human civilisation, and everywhere they found the enigmatic remains of the Others to taunt them.

Forbes said, "And why shouldn't we look for the radio-active ore?"

Smith said patiently, "I told you. The Regs say that if evidence of the Others is found, the area around it must be left undisturbed, and the Archeological Division must be informed."

Forbes said plaintively, "But why should we be deprived of a bonus."

Smith looked at him with amusement in his glance. "All right," he said. "We'll break another Reg. After all, its my last trip."

Forbes walked along bouncily, occasionally glancing at the dials, dancing on the end of a stiff cable that led over his shoulder to the radiation detector strapped to his back. He was walking through drifts of fine sand that had been collected beside the granite outcrops aud the air was full of hazy clouds of sand particles, dispersing and drifting down slowly in the still afternoon air.

Forbes was beginning to see that these outcrops were radiating from a central node of ore, just like it was shown in the geology books. It should be worth quite a bit, he thought, and then laughed softly as he remembered how Smith had suddenly assented to the search for the ore when he had realised that he might miss a bonus.

Forbes glanced at the direction indicator, and veered to the left, climbing up a steep incline between two outcrops that were radiating from the central node and began closing together towards the top of the cleft.

Smith walked slowly along behind, looking around him automatically for any signs of danger. He felt a foreboding, somehow. He'd broken more Regs on this trip than he had for years, and he was waiting for the consequences. If you break the Regs, you should be ready for anything to happen, he thought.

Fifty metres ahead of him, Forbes disappeared to the left behind a great slab of rock, and Smith broke into a lumbering run to catch him up. He reached the incline between the two outcrops and started up it, breathing heavily.

He was on granite now, and he could see that he had climbed above the soil and was on a small hill between two radiating outcrops. He reached the top of the narrow cleft and stood staring, slitting his eyes against the wind that blew at the height he had reached on the journey up from the beach. He was at the side of an exposed nub of rock that rose to a gentle point at the centre, and on the point,

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capping it, was a small metal cube. Forbes was standing before it, staring. When Smith drew closer, he saw that the cube was actually made of the same material as the platform beneath the beach.

The erection was about two metres along the horizontal distances, and about one and a half metres high.

When Smith reached him, Forbes said, "What do you make of it?"

Smith slowly walked around the cube; the sides were bare, there was nothing on them but thousands of small pittings, presumably produced by wind-borne sand. On a hunch, he tried to look at the top. At one and a half metres, it was above his eye level, and above Forbes' head. He stood on the tips of his toes and peered. From the acute angle he was looking at, there seemed to be some sort of yellowish cross set in the grey material of the roof. Smith turned to Forbes, "Give me a hand up."

When he was settled on the top of the thing, he looked closely at the cross. The yellow was sand, he realised, and he put a finger on it. It was yielding, and obviously filling up slots or grooves in the surface of the cube. He scooped out the sand and studied the cross. The arms were about a centimetre wide and five long, quite shallowly grooved into the top of the cube. Smith could make nothing of it, and slid off the top to let Forbes inspect it. Forbes reached up, caught the edge of the cube in his hands and pulled himself up with an easy heave. He inspected the cross, then thought for a second. Then he looked at the sharp edges formed where the sides of the cube met the top.

"Yes," he said "I thought so." He looked down at Smith with a smile on his face. "Take a look," he said.

Smith looked at the edge. Faintly, he could see a hair line that ran completely round the edge of the artifact.

"What is it?" he said to Forbes.

"The whole top is a door," replied Forbes, "and the cross is the lock." He jumped off the top and landed with a soft thump on the rock.

"How do you open it?" asked Smith.

"Ask the Others. I can't tell you. I can think of a thousand ways to do it, and I'd bet you they were all wrong. That lock could depend on the type of key you used, the type of metal the key was made of, or maybe you have to press it in a certain manner. I wouldn't know.

"Whatever it is, it wouldn't be simple. If you wrap a thing up in a case like this it's something you don't want every passer-by to be able to open. I think that we'd do best to use an atomic cutter on it."

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Smith said firmly, " There will be nothing of the sort used on that. We're going to leave the cube where it is, call up the Archeological Division, and let them handle it."

Forbes said nothing, which surprised Smith slightly. Perhaps Forbes is taking the Regs a bit more seriously, he thought.

An hour later, they went back to the ship, having mapped the approximate location of the ore and the cube. They climbed the ladder to the airlock, sealed the airlock behind them with the automatic alarms, and went into the control cabin. Smith took off his helmet with a sigh of relief and went over to the controls. He sat down in his chair and started preparing for the takeoff. Suddenly some sixth sense that spacemen develop, if they live long enough, made him turn round.

The heavy weight of the radiation detector, meant for the back of his head, struck him high up on his forehead. He slumped down slowly, the gimbal-mounted chair rocking slowly backwards and forwards.

When he came to, he realised that he was strapped down on the acceleration bunk in his sleep cubicle. He automatically groped with his hand for the release grip that should have been hanging within reach, then realised that Forbes had pulled it out of his reach. He heaved on the straps, but they were firmly pulled across his chest and arms, thighs and ankles. He began to shout until the metal walls vibrated in sympathy.

After about half a minute, Forbes appeared in the open door of the sleep cubicle, with an automatic cutter strapped securely to his back.

" You've got a hard head, Smithy. It's lucky that I bothered to strap you down, otherwise you might have surprised me."

Smith said, " What are you going to do?" in a tense voice although he subconsciously knew the answer. He moved his head to prevent the trickle of blood, from his forehead, running in his eyes.

" Open that tin can on the node of ore, of course."

" You needn't have knocked me out, I'd have let you go . . ."

" Like hell, you would !"

There was a silence. Then Smith licked his lips; they had suddenly gone dry. The feeling of foreboding was stronger.

" You know what the Regs say, don't you. This will ruin your career if it comes out."

Forbes' face twisted angrily, and Smith realised with a sick feeling that he had said the wrong thing. Forbes walked slowly over to Smith, and stood beside him, looking down.

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" You and your damn Regs, Smithy." His mouth tightened. " All this Survey you've been treating me like a kid. 'What about the Regs . . . what about the Regs . . .' " He imitated Smith's voice.

" The Regs are for old fools like you, fogies that should have been retired to their childish dirt-farming long ago. But I can think for myself, I can make up my own Regs ! So you think that doing this will ruin my career, do you?" His voice softened.

" Do you honestly think that it will ruin my career to be known as the man who solved the problem of the Others?" He turned on his heel and walked out of the sleeping cubicle. Smith listened to his steps, clicking along the corridor into the control room. Five paces across the control cabin to the inner door of the airlock, the creak of the opening door, the slam as Forbes shut it behind him.

There was a sudden ringing, loud in the silent ship as Forbes opened the outer door of the airlock without unsealing the automatic alarms. Above the clamour, Smith could hear the scrapes as Forbes went down the ladder to the beach.

The feeling of foreboding was very strong.

Smith began to work furiously at the straps, trying to arch his back enough to be able to reach the release grip. The straps stretched slightly. They were only designed to prevent a movement in Deep Freeze which might break a brittle-with-cold limb, and weren't made to resist a continuous pressure.

Forbes would be walking towards the area where sand blended into soil; perhaps he was looking over his shoulder with that bird-like motion of his at the ship, listening to the noise of the alarm bells, watching out for pursuit.

The blood was trickling down Smith's cheek in a warm steady flow, half blinding him . He was feeling weak with the physical exertions and the blow, and the bells were ringing, ringing, ringing . . .

He groped with his hand, but the release grip was still out of reach. Smith began to sweat as he heaved, his shoulder muscles aching.

Forbes would be shuffling through the sand drifts that had collected beside the outcrops.

Smith reached the release grip and squeezed it. The straps fell away. He swung his legs off the bunk and tried to stand up, but his knees buckled, and he fell to the floor, feeling the cold metal against his cheek. Slowly he stood up, the alarm bells and the ringing inside his head blending into one mad cacophony.

He reached the control cabin and turned off the alarms. The silence was shocking. He saw a shining soap bubble on the floor and bent down to pick it up. He slowly overbalanced onto his head,

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giggling foolishly. He put the soap bubble over his head, trying not to touch himself with it in case it burst. He clipped the helmet into place, "Mustn't forget the Regulations, must we?" he told himself inanely.

As he went towards the airlock, walking unsteadily, he heard the explosion.

The surveyship rocked unsteadily on its tail as the blast hit and the hull rang with the impacts of the rock splinters pattering against it.

He had lain dormant in the centre of the web of tunnels for twenty thousand years, squatting in the metal cube on top of the node of ore. He had lain dormant since his master had gone away and left him to await their return.

The second planet had rolled around the red sun, gradually falling into it as contact with the ten kilometre spaced hydrogen atoms of the spacial clouds had slowly robbed it of its orbital speed. The seasons had come and gone twenty thousand times, and the sea had gradually advanced, eating away the desert with a little nibble here and a little nibble there, and still he lay dormant.

Suddenly, he half woke. What had awoken him? An object falling through the radar field that still feebly covered the area? Had the masters returned? He looked through the walls of his shelter, half roused, but he could see nothing. A mistake.

A time passed. He saw a thing coming towards him, followed by another at a short distance. Were these the masters? He searched back through his memory banks. He had forgotten the appearance of the masters!

They walked around him. One scrambled on top, fingering the control. Tensely he waited for the signal to open, but no impulse came.

These were not the masters, he was sure. If they were, they would have known the signal. He recalled the last message of the masters and applied it to the situation. No. Wait.

He waited.

The creatures went away. He sank into a dormancy once more.

One of the things returned, lumbering towards him. He awoke. Fire ate into him.

The last message of the masters came floating up from his memory banks. He applied it once more. A decision was made.

He set off the self destruction device as the masters had ordered him to do if he was in danger of discovery and examination, and he blew himself up together with an area immediately around him.

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Smith returned from the area of devastation cursing silently. This was what came of disregarding the Regs—of regarding them as something to be laughed at. Forbes had not had the experience needed to realise that the Regs had been painfully evolved over a long period of time by a lot of people as a protection against the unknown. He blamed himself for letting the youngster deride him into relaxing the hard-learned tenets of the Regs, of letting him have his own way because he had been the mirror-image of himself those forty years ago.

Before he blasted off for Earth to fulfil yet another Regulation—that of reporting immediately just such a happening as this—his mind had a glimmering of the truth surrounding the mystery. He thought the cube may have been some kind of mine left there by the Others—some kind of cybernetic brain which could only be operated by the Others themselves, when, and if, they ever returned.

What he didn't know was that, after more than twenty thousand years, the 'memory' of the brain was failing as the patterns on the germanium diodes faded—and the brain failed to recognise the descendants of the Others as they returned to the stars once again.

Richard Varne

THE LITERARY LINE-UP

Readers may remember that in last month's "Profiles" author Lan Wright stated that one of his ambitions was to write a really outstanding science fiction novel. He moves a step nearer this ambition next month when we publish his novelette "The Messengers." Apart from the basic idea—given faster-than-light travel radio messages would be hopelessly out of date so all important business throughout the Galaxy is done by human messengers—it is a smooth-actioned story with some very neat surprises.

There will also be a first-class story by Alfred Bester whose novel *The Demolished Man* came second in this year's International Fantasy Award, another C. M. Kornbluth story, plus E. C. Tubb and E. R. James both with better-than-average material. It looks an excellent issue with something to suit all tastes.

Story rating for No. 26 were :

1.	Wild Talent (Part 1) - - - - -	Wilson Tucker.
2.	The Firebird - - - - - -	Alan Barclay.
3.	The Minus Men - - - - - -	E. R. James.
4.	The Last Weapon - - - - - -	Robert Sheckley.
5.	Bitter The Path - - - - - -	Kenneth Bulmer.

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What makes a man a hero ? Is it the ability to make split second decisions at the right moment—lack of fear during a crisis—preservation of others before self—or just being powerless to stem the course of events once circumstances have set them in motion ? Whatever the motive, Hassinger was a hero....

PORTRAIT OF A SPACEMAN

By Sydney J. Bounds

Illustrated by HUNTER

I slipped out of the control box when the summons came: MISS HARDIE TO REPORT TO MR. BERG. It was irritating to leave in the middle of production, with the cameras turning and the actors speaking my lines and the whole world looking-in. Though I would miss the sponsor's blurb, and that was something.

The corridor was an avenue of white silence, deserted. Only the red lights above the studio doors indicated that work was in progress. I went up, left the cage at the sixth floor, and entered Berg's office.

He was alone, which was unusual. Berg liked to surroud himself with secretaries. He was standing at a window, looking out over the lights of London; again unusual, for the Berg fancied himself behind that immense desk, a cigar between his lips and a far-away look in his eyes. Cold blue eyes which earned him the nickname of 'Iceberg'.

He turned as I came in, and flung up one arm in a dramatic gesture. Beyond him, I saw a red pin-point of light in the night darkness.

"The Mars Express," he said, as if I didn't know. "There's a story for you, Jill."

I sat down and waited. I knew the signs; there was a job brewing.

Berg left the window and went to his desk. He toyed with a plastic calender, of which all I could see was the year: 1982.

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"Twenty-five years ago, the first manned spaceship landed on Mars," he said. "Twenty-five years is just the right length of time for a centenary broadcast. It's Jacobs' idea."

I didn't bother to point out that a centenary implied one hundred years. Fine points like that were beyond sponsors.

"Historical survey?" I suggested.

Berg shook his head.

"There's an angle. Concentrate on one man, a well-known veteran. Jacobs wants a programme called 'Portrait of a Spaceman' for the Sudsy-soap half-hour. He wants you to handle it."

I thought it over.

"All the well-known veterans have had their lives written up so many times that one story contradicts another. We'll have to find somebody new." The name I wanted was on the tip of my tongue but I didn't say it then.

"That's right," Berg said encouragingly. He looked at me slyly. "Jacobs is interested in you, Jill."

"Jacobs is a greasy old man who can't keep his hands to himself!"

"He can help your career," Berg said.

"Thanks, I'll manage my own career."

Berg sighed. A producers' job wasn't all honey—he had to spend too much time persuading sponsors from manhandling programmes and staff alike.

"Any ideas, Jill?"

"Ernie Hassinger," I replied promptly.

He repeated the name, rolling it round his tongue, wondering about it.

"Ernie Hassenger was engineer on the *Martian Queen*," I said. "He sacrificed his life to save the ship. That was in '70."

"I remember. The atomic pile exploded, or something."

"Not exactly, but there was a bad leak and the engine room became flooded with radiation."

I had it all pat; but then I was only seventeen and Ernie Hassinger was a particular hero of mine. I don't know why. Plenty of other men gave their lives in the early days of space-flight. Perhaps it was because his was the first story I read as a school-girl. Perhaps it was because he had always been overlooked by the compilers of space sagas. Anyway, I had a 'thing' about Hassinger—I wanted to be the one to put his name in lights.

"The *Martian Queen*," I said, "was an old ship, using a uranium pile and controlled manually. She carried a crew of five, twenty-seven passengers, including woman and children, and stores for the colony. Hassinger was engineer, in charge of pile."

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The legend of Ernie Hassinger came to life in my mind as I spoke. I warmed to my theme.

"Imagine the ship in space, isolated, a tiny world in the vast infinities between planets. Then trouble with the pile—and no help within millions of miles. Thirty-two human beings faced with death in its most horrible form, death from radiation poisoning, slow and ghastly and certain."

Berg listened with half-closed eyes.

"The engine room was sealed off. There was nothing anyone could do. The captain led the ship's company in prayer. They were never going to reach Mars—the ship would go on and on into the endless void and, long before the atomic fuel was expended, they would all be dead."

I was beginning to see it in script form, placing my cameras, thinking in terms of dialogue and action.

"Hassinger slips away. Close-up of his face, showing determination. We see the massive door of the engine room, hear a Gieger clicking as it measures the deadly radiation leaking out. Hassinger puts on

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a lead-lined suit. He talks to himself: 'This is my job. Got to go through with it. Better for one man to die than all.' We watch him open the door and enter the engine room. The door closes.

"Switch to the captain, some time later. Hassinger is reported missing. The level of radiation falls. Final shot of the captain speaking: 'Hassinger gave his life that we might live, but his sacrifice will be remembered long after the *Martian Queen* is forgotten'."

Berg came back to life, rubbing his hands.

"Good stuff, Jill. You're going to make a name for yourself in TV. Go ahead—the Hassinger story is all yours!"

I went down to the offices of Spaceways and talked to the publicity man. He couldn't help much. Hassingers' records had been destroyed. I tried old newspaper files of the period, and the Public Records Office. What I wanted was the names and addresses of people who had actually known Hassinger.

The first on my list was Esther Cox. She had been Hassinger's schoolteacher.

She lived out at Bushey, one of the newer North London suburbs. I videoed her I was coming and hired on electric run-about to take me there. She lived in a bungalow, a white-haired spinster of eighty.

"Come in, Miss Hardie. I've some tea waiting. I'm so glad you're here, there's nothing I like better than to talk about Ernie. He was my star pupil, you know . . ."

I perched on the edge of a high-backed chair and sipped tea from a fragile cup. I was beginning to get the idea; Esther Cox's sole claim to fame was that she taught Hassinger—and she wasn't going to let anybody forget it.

"Of course, he didn't seem anyone special at the time, but then, we weren't to know the future, were we, Miss Hardie? A very ordinary boy—I might even say dull—not at all interested in lessons. I taught English, by the way. He was never quite bottom of the class, but, well . . .

"It was the times you know. He was evacuated to the country during the war of '39—his parents were killed in an air-raid, later—and education never had a chance with the children then. Not a bright pupil, but fascinated by mechanical things. He spent hours taking his cycle to pieces and cleaning the parts.

"A good boy, Miss Hardie? Oh, yes. Ernie rarely gave me any trouble. He liked to read a lot, cheap magazines and comics. Not literature. Science-fiction it used to be called, about journeys to other planets. I've often thought it was that which decided him to become a spaceman.

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"He left me when he was fifteen—that would be '45, towards the end of that dreadful war. I never saw him again. I've still got cuttings of the *Martian Queen*, if you're interested. And a photograph of Ernie."

The cuttings were dead stuff to me. The photograph was an old one, black-and-white, and not very well printed. It must have been taken some short while before his last trip. It showed a man who looked older than his years, dressed in Spaceways' coveralls and bareheaded. His hair was thinning, there were lines etched in his face and the flesh sagged under his eyes.

There was nothing distinguished about the man in the picture, nothing to indicate his heroic qualities.

I called on George Palmer at his flat. He was a retired Civil Servant, a stout man, sallow-faced—Ernie Hassinger's uncle, the sole surviving relative.

"So you want to know about Ernie? Not much I can tell you. Didn't distinguish himself till after we lost touch—I never saw much of him after he joined Spaceways. Before that? Bit of a loafer, I thought. Tried to get him into my department, but he failed the examination."

"Yes, he came to me from school. His parents were dead and I felt some responsibility. He had a number of jobs; errand-boy, factory-hand, window cleaner. Didn't stick at anything for long."

"Queer, how things turn out. If you'd told me then that Ernie would cover himself with glory, I'd have laughed. Proud of him now, though. Often wished we'd got on better . . .

"Well, no, not exactly trouble, you understand. But I thought he should have tried harder. He was clever with his hands, good at mechanical things—but wouldn't concentrate. Ah, yes—when he studied for Spaceways, that was different. He worked then.

"Perhaps I was too hard on him. Difficult boy to understand. Always got his head in one of these science-fiction magazines. Rubbish, I call 'em, but then I'm old-fashioned and, anyway, it's all happened, hasn't it? Ernie had star-dust in his eyes, a dreamer . . .

"His parents? I suppose he would take after his mother, a beautiful woman, dark-skinned, fond of music. His father was a labourer, never made much of himself.

"Girls? Odd fellow, Ernie—would take a girl to the three-dee, but it never got beyond that. He never had a love affair that I know of. Still, he wasn't much to look at."

Palmer found a photograph for me. This one was a better job, a portrait study, in colour.

"Taken when he was twenty-five," Palmer said.

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I saw a serious young man with a long nose and scrawny neck; his lower lip protruded slightly and his eyes might have been glazed. Darkish hair, a pale skin.

The university building was steel and concrete and glass, air-conditioned and brilliantly lit. Ralph Goodwin, who had instructed Hassinger in atomic engineering, was a tubby little man with a shock of grey hair and wore a loose-fitting suit of artificial wool.

"Hassinger was twenty-seven when he came to me. That was the autumn of '57, shortly after the first ship landed on Mars. He was very keen, so I gave him a chance—otherwise I'd have turned him down on account of his age. He was not a brilliant pupil, but he worked hard. Slow and sure, that was Ernest Hassinger.

"No, he didn't make many friends. It took him all his time to keep up with the rest of the class—he'd had a poor education—and that left him without much of a social life. He hadn't the money for it, either.

"The first year was hard on him. His uncle refused to have anything to do with him and he only existed by working during the evenings. After my first report, however, Mr. Palmer changed his mind. He saw that Hassinger was trying to make something of himself, and helped him in the matter of school fees.

"Yes, four years he was with me. In '61, he joined Spaceways.

"Perhaps I've made him seem too stolid. It's true he had his nose to the grindstone, but he had a purpose behind him. He was one of the few who looked on becoming a spaceman as more than just a job. He believed in Man's destiny amongst the stars. An idealist I suppose you'd call him."

I had to wait three days to see Daniel Lucas. The Mars-ship *Red Devil* was only just in and quarantine regulations were strict.

We met at a corner table in a bar at the spaceport. Lucas was small and slight, his face wrinkled and the colour of walnut; his eyes a clear, shining blue.

I told him I was building up a character study of Hassinger for a TV programme and he was silent a long time. Almost as if he were reluctant to speak.

"What is it you want me to say, Miss Hardie? The story of the *Martian Queen* is well-known. Ernie was a hero. Isn't that enough?"

Lucas was my most difficult interview. I had to prompt him all the time.

"What was he like as a man? Well, just like anyone else—no-one called him a hero till he was dead. He did his job, travelled from Earth to Mars, took his leave in the usual way. I'd say he wasn't very different from any of us.

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"Good at his job? Yes, I'd say that. But then no-one got into Spaceways unless he knew his job.

"Any personal stories about Ernie? I don't remember any, but I didn't know him well. We shipped together three or four times, that's all. I can't think of anything you'd want to hear.

"Yes he got on all right with the rest of the crew. Not that that means much. You haven't been 'out there'? I thought not. You wouldn't understand—space does things to a man. It's a question of taking a man as you find him and not looking for faults.

"In space, you're cooped up together a long time, like sardines in a tin—and all round you is emptiness. It's beautiful the first time; after that . . . the fear gets you. A different kind of fear from anything an Earthbound person can know. You think of all the things that could go wrong. You see how small you are compared with the universe. You feel . . . insignificant.

"Yes, that's the clue to understanding a spaceman. The feeling of insignificance. Go up to a mountain top at night, alone, and look at the stars. You'll get something like it. Then imagine yourself inside metal walls, floating out there, surrounded by emptiness and the stars. It's frightening. It's the sort of experience that makes or breaks a man.

"Whatever Ernie Hassinger was, he knew that fear, like the rest of us. Now they call him a hero. Leave it at that, Miss Hardie—don't probe too deep."

Sometimes I wish I had left it at that, but I didn't. Berg's spies turned up a new name; Vera Foulkes. According to rumour, Hassinger had had an affair with her—and romance was just what I needed for the Sudsy-Soap half hour.

She lived in a luxury flat decorated in bad taste. Everything clashed. The room was a junk heap, one passing fashion piled on top of another. Vera was a big woman with a brassy voice.

"Yes, I remember Ernie Hassinger. We went around together for a couple of months, till he tired of me. Ernie was like that—take what he could get from one woman, then move on to the next. Not exactly a stable character.

"Love, dearie? Well, I wouldn't call it that, exactly, not in my profession. But he treated me all right. Spacemen are highly paid, you know, and Ernie wasn't mean . . .

"That would be in '67. A hero? Don't make me laugh! He was scared stiff of making another trip. Every time was the same. He'd land, come whining to me, dope himself up—then go back.

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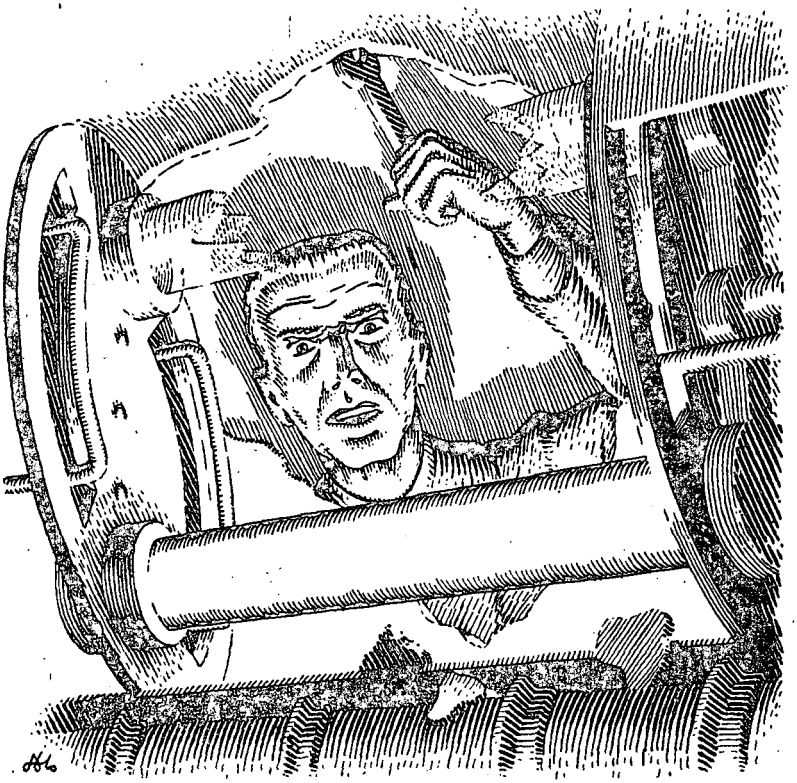

It was the money, you see. He had to have big money and there was no other way of getting it.

"Oh, sure, I heard the official Spaceways hand-out—sacrificed himself to save the ship. Not Ernie, not if I know him! Whatever happened on the *Martian Queen*, it wasn't like that.

"He was jealous as hell, too. I remember once . . . but we won't go into that. He could swear like the best of them, and had a foul temper. More than once I only escaped a beating by getting him drunk. He was no plaster saint, was Ernie!

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"You mark my words, dearie, you get to the bottom of the *Martian Queen* business and you'll change your tune about Ernie Hassinger."

It was official. The message slip which Berg handed me came from the private office of Walter Shayne, Director of Spaceways.

I was called at eleven o'clock in the morning and was ushered into a vast room, the floor covered by rich carpets, the walls hung with colour-photos of old ships. Shayne was alone, sleek and sharp and immaculately dressed. His smile was cold.

"Miss Hardie, my organization has co-operated with you TV people on more than one occasion, so I don't think it very generous of you to go behind my back."

He ignored my remark about the lack of help I'd received from Spaceways' publicity department.

"Hassinger wouldn't thank you for digging up the past. He sacrificed his life to save his ship. He was a hero in the eyes of the public—leave it there, Miss Hardie.

"*Drop the Hassenger story.*"

Short, sharp, and to the point. But as I left, I couldn't help wondering what Spaceways had to hide.

I talked it over with Berg. He was uneasy, and I guessed that someone had been putting pressure on him.

"Will Jacobs stand the racket?" I asked.

He shrugged.

"If it will sell Sudsy-Soap . . . dammit, Jill, we don't take orders from Spaceways! Go ahead. Dig out whatever it is we're not supposed to find. Whether we use it will depend on what it is. I'm curious to know what actually happened on the *Martian Queen*—and I want to know about Ernie Hassinger."

But I didn't get any further until a letter was handed in at the desk. The writer signed himself: Toby Jugg, and scribbled almost indecipherably on a sheet of cheap and grimy paper.

If you want to know what really happened, bring five hundred Credits to the Hell Hole, after dark tonight.

Berg did some checking. Toby Jugg had been one of the crew of the *Martian Queen* . . .

I took the money, wrapped in brown paper, to the Hell Hole. It was a disreputable tavern in the slum area bordering the space-port. The authorities had long given up the attempt to clean up this area. The men who lived here were wrecks, men whom space had broken and discarded. Human dregs that society agreed to ignore.

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It was a filthy place, stinking with refuse. Unwashed men in clothes smelling of oil and dirt sat round the dingy walls. They were men without spirit. They drank or smoked, rarely talked, never played a card game. Mostly, they just sat.

I went up to the proprietor and asked for Toby Jugg. He took me behind the bar and through a curtained doorway. There was a small room, dark except for the moonlight filtering in through a narrow window set high in the wall.

A man lay on a bed. He was thin, the bones showing clearly through his scanty flesh. His eyes were too bright, and he clutched a bottle to his chest.

"Toby Jugg?" I said.

He stared at me with his bright eyes, took a pull from the bottle. The liquor ran down his chin.

"That's me," he said. "You Jill Hardie? Brought the money?"

I placed the brown paper parcel on the table. There was a chair, but I didn't sit down.

"It's here," I told him, "and it's yours if you can tell me the truth. I want to know what happened aboard the *Martian Queen*. I want to know what sort of a man was Ernie Hassinger."

Toby Jugg cackled with laughter.

"Ernie was a hero. Ernie gave his life for others. Haven't you heard?"

His voice was odd. He might have been drunk, or doped, or just plain crazy.

"What was it *really* like," I asked softly, "when the pile leaked radiation, and you waited for death to come?"

He mumbled something to himself that I didn't catch.

"*That rat, Hassinger—*"

The venom in his voice shook me. It was a nightmare. Remember, I was only seventeen and Ernie Hassinger was my special hero.

Ernie had star-dust in his eyes, a dreamer . . .

He believed in Man's destiny amongst the stars . . . an idealist I suppose you'd call him.

"Hassinger was no good," Toby Jugg said. "He cracked wide open when he got into space. It's not pleasant to see a man shorn of the veneer society grafts onto him—it's like looking at an animal, skinned . . .

"To understand what happened aboard the *Martian Queen*, you have to know something about space. It breeds fear. Not fear of any matterial object — fear of yourself — fear of your own inadequacy."

What had Lucas called it? *The feeling of insignificance.*

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"Out there, a man is tested. Two trips are enough. The rest of the crew watch you . . . either you take it, or break up—there's no middle course, no acting a part. Hassinger didn't have what it takes and he cracked. When that happens . . ."

Toby Jugg stared at me intensely.

"I cracked," he said. "So did every other man you'll find in the Hell Hole. Why d'you think we're here, living as we do? We haven't any self-respect left—that's what space does to a man. Destroys him.

"Hassinger used dope. He became vicious. He'd steal, not money, but sentimental things—a girl's photograph, a lucky charm, a family heirloom—from his mates. Can you imagine what sort of trouble that makes in a ship in space? It's bad. He told stories, too—unpleasant stories about the men who shipped with him. He was always running to some Spaceways official . . .

"You're getting the set-up? This isn't the sort of thing the public hears about. Spacemen are wonderful, a race apart, heroes—well, some of 'em are, but not many. There's something else you need to know, too. Out there, the laws of Earth are suspended.

"It's unofficial, of course, but it's the only way to keep the space lanes open. In an emergency, the captain's word is law—and Spaceways backs him to the limit. The captain is a god on his ship. He has it to give life, or take it . . . that's how it has to be, out there. You'll see what I'm getting at in a minute. You'll see why Ernie Hassinger sacrificed his life and became a hero.

"It's bluff, the most gigantic bluff that's ever been pulled."

Toby Jugg stopped to take another pull at his bottle.

"I'm getting to the *Martian Queen*, but you wouldn't understand without this background. You'd think Captain Moss was some kind of monster, and he wasn't. He was the real hero. He was a ***man***, the sort that never cracks in an emergency—a real spaceman.

"He's dead now, so what I'm going to tell you can't hurt him.

"The *Martian Queen* was five days out when the trouble started. Hassinger was using dope. The captain could have locked him up, but we didn't have another engineer—so he was watched, his drug supply severely limited. That would have been all right if . . . well, never mind that. Anyone can be wise after the event.

"Hassinger was left unguarded for a fraction of a minute. No longer than that, I swear. He locked himself in the engine room and we couldn't get at him, and what happened after that, I can only guess.

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" He must have had a secret cache of the drug in there. He filled himself up with the dope and went berserk. You can't imagine the strength a man has under those conditions—*he smashed the protective sheathing about the pile* ! Smashed it deliberately. Of course, he must have been insane . . .

" The first signs of radiation must have scared him back to his senses. He came out of the engine room as if he had been shot from a cannon. He was gibbering with fear.

" After that, he was tied down. The captain declared a state of emergency and locked the passengers in their cabins. Remember, we were carrying woman and children, and the Martian colony was depending on us to bring in vital stores. Moss had one hell of a responsibility.

" There was no immediate danger, for the engine room was sealed off. We had time to think. Moss didn't panic. He worked it all out and made his decision in cold blood. We'd never get to Mars. We'd overshoot. And eventually the radiation would penetrate the bulkheads and get us. We were doomed unless the protective sheathing in the engine room was repaired . . . and Hassinger was the only man who could handle it.

" The captain talked to him for an hour. Hassinger wouldn't budge. He refused point blank to go into the engine room. You see, we all knew he wouldn't come out. He might have time to do the job, but it would kill him.

" He knew it—and the captain knew it.

" Moss gave him one last chance. No. He'd take his chance with the rest of us. He wasn't going to be a ruddy hero !

" The captain took his chief officer aside and spoke to him. The pair of them put on lead suits, and brought in a third. They didn't speak. They forced Hassinger into that third suit and dragged him aft.

" At the door of the engine room, Moss spoke: ' Hassinger, we're putting you inside. We'll let you out when you've stopped the leak. Not before.' My God, he fought and screamed like a madman, but Moss and the chief held him. Somehow, they got the door open and pushed him in, locked it again. Then they went for'ard, and waited. We all waited.

" Sometimes I try to imagine how Hassinger felt. He was alone with a leaky pile, in a room flooded with deadly radiation. *Locked in.* He had one chance—fix the leak before the radiation got him. He must have worked in a frenzy. He must have known the ultimate fear. Maybe he even tried to fix it so the rest of us could live . . . I don't know.

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" He repaired that leak—and he died. The captain never spoke a word while Hassinger was in there, just sat at the controls, waiting, watching the instruments After twenty-four hours, the radiation went down sufficiently for someone to go in. Moss went himself.

" ' It's all right,' he said. 'We'll get through. Hassinger died a hero's death.' And that was that,"

Toby Jugg slumped back on his bed. There was a long silence.

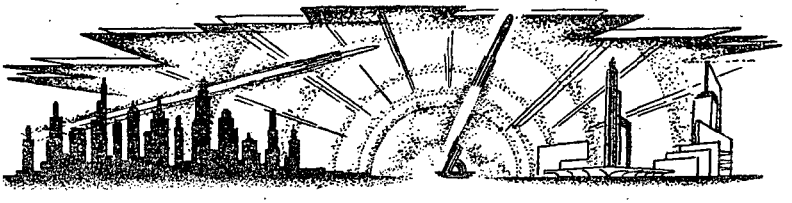
" That what you wanted to know, Miss Hardie?"

I nodded. Just then, words wouldn't attach themselves to any meaning in my head. I pointed at the brown paper parcel on the table and walked out.

I didn't tell Berg the whole story, just enough for him to decide we couldn't use it. Jacobs never found out why we dropped ' Portrait of a Spaceman'.

The Sudsy-Soap half-hour went on the air with a programme called: ' Romance of the Spaceways.'

Sydney J. Bounds



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There are some things that are unconquerable—imponderables the total might of civilisation are powerless to overcome, or their mighty armies crush. Yet, in the attempt, something may be learned—if only that might is not always right.

OCCUPATION

By Edward W. Ludwig

The red light over the door of the strato-jet blinked on. Once, twice, three times.

"This is it," said Lieutenant Perkins.

No one answered. There was a shuffling of feet, an adjusting of goggles, a clearing of throats. The door slid open noiselessly. A hissing Somian wind whipped into the plane's cabin, obscuring the dull rumble of jets.

"This is it," repeated Horton at last.

Lieutenant Perkins bailed out first. His tall body leaned into the wind, into the darkness, and suddenly he was gone. Horton and Gottlieb and Lopez and Chang and Green followed like toy soldiers on a factory belt, erect, being carried forward, then tumbling off one by one, counting the silent seconds with their leaps.

Down they hurtled and spun and twisted, down, down into the cool Somian night in this year 2055. They were no longer Lieutenant Perkins and Horton and Gottlieb and Lopez and Chang and Green, no longer paratroopers of a United Earth. They were night-things, formless blobs, their names and identities surrendered to the darkness. Horton pressed the stud over his chest, snapping on his shoulder para-jets. He felt the hot rush of air on his legs, scowled as the weight of deceleration pressed his head down and squeezed it against his chest.

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The unpleasantness was soon over. Horton looked about him, at the blobs that were now floating instead of falling, at the specks of crimson from the para-jets, no larger than sparks from cigarette lighters. Above him gleamed the planet's three tiny moons, each the size of Venus in the early-morning skies of Earth, their pale glow reflected dimly by dark, vast seas of Somian wheat.

And he thought, over a fifth of Somia it must be like this. Over all the land inside the Wall men are falling, now, at this very second, thousands and thousands of them.

He glanced up at the stars. Which one is Sol? That one should be it—or is that Sirius? I wish I was sure. Then I'd wish I was there, in the System, on Earth. It'd be a great joke to look at a star and wish I was there and then have it turn out to be Sirius. A great joke.

He laughed, and then the laughter died. This is war, he thought, this is invasion. You don't think about Earth now.

His jaw hardened, becoming a conqueror's jaw. His head raised, becoming a conqueror's head. For an instant strength was in him, but suddenly it was gone, like a match flame snuffed out by the blackness of infinity. And in its stead was a great weariness.

First Venus, he thought, and then Mars, and Jupiter, or at least Jupiter's moons, and now Alpha Centauri. The universe must be safe for the colonists of a United Earth. But at least Alpha has only one planet. That's something to be thankful for, because this will be the last—for awhile. Thank you, God, that Alpha has only one planet.

The broad expanse of Somian wheat burst up into his vision.

Woosh!

With a swishing and a thudding, his feet cut through the jungle of wheat and collided with hard earth. Breath exploded from his lungs. He sat on a cushion of crushed stalks, puffing, shaking his head . . .

"Where's Green?" snapped a voice.

"I'm here," someone said in the darkness.

"Where's Horton?"

"Where's Horton?"

Horton's head jerked up.

"I'm here."

Lieutenant Perkins cleared his throat. "All right, the six of us are here. Now here's the idea. The Somians inside the Wall have no army, no cities, just a few houses along the Wall and in the fields. So it'll be guerilla stuff—house to house fighting, probably. We got

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to get them before they get organized. We don't know what to expect, but remember they've had atomic power for 10,000 years. They're an ancient race and a queer race. So keep your eyes open, and keep 'em away from the sky. You'll have plenty of time to look for Sol."

They walked slowly and cautiously, shouldering little paths through the neck-high forest of wheat, R-rifles in tight, ready hands.

A queer race . . . atomic power for ten thousand years . . . don't know what to expect. The words echoed through Horton's mind. The nine-month war with 4,000,000 Somian swamp-people outside the Wall had been rugged enough. And the swamp-people had no atomic weapons, only contraband heat guns smuggled in during the past five years.

But the 100,000 Somians inside the Wall, Horton knew, were different. Of course, Intelligence reports were optimistic. Atomics, but no army. A few secret meetings, but no mass gatherings, no suggestion of possible strategies. It was odd.

"I remember a verse," murmured Green. "Will you walk into my parlour, said the spider to the fly." He paused, "What comes next?"

"I don't know," said Horton, "but you're thinking what I'm thinking."

"Let's keep it quiet," growled Lieutenant Perkins.

They walked.

The slow heavy tread of their footsteps was as familiar to Horton as breath in his lungs. You could narrow your eyes, looking at the boots and nothing else, and imagine them sloshing through the jungles of Venus, the sands of Mars, the swamps of Somia. And now the wheat fields of Somia. The heaviness, the slowness, the weariness were the same.

"There's the Wall of China," whispered Lopez, pointing.

Despite the feebleness of Somian moonlight, it shone white and solid, a great stone wall separating field from swamp, a monstrous ribbon twisting and melting into a black horizon.

"Why did they name it the Wall of China?" crisped Green. "This is Somia, not China."

"How does anything get named?" asked Chang. "Names just happen. I suppose a Chinese saw it first and it reminded him of home, and so called it the Wall of China. Besides, it was built for the same purpose."

"Shut up." snapped Lieutenant Perkins. There's a house up there."

A small stone house at the foot of the Wall.

The enemy.

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Fear came to Horton. It was a cold, paralysing tide bursting in his stomach, shooting fingers of ice into his weak legs, pounding into his heart, into his taut-muscled, sweat-beaded face.

I'm not afraid, he told himself. I'm a soldier, I've been in battles, I've seen death and faced death. I'm not afraid.

A moist swamp-wind licked across the surface of the wheat, teasing the slender stalks into reluctant, rustling rhythm. And the wind was like a soft voice within him, saying, "But this is different. It's different somehow. We belonged, maybe, on Venus and Mars and Ganymede, but not here. We don't belong here, and we don't know what's going to happen."

They approached the house, crouching low, stopping as they reached the fringe of wheat stalks. The front door of the house was open, a pale rectangle of light, the golden, quivering light cast by oil lamps.

Suddenly, movement.

A dark figure emerging from the doorway, slowly, shuffling onto the stone patio before the house. Then another figure, and another, each carrying something in its arms.

And then a fourth, this one holding an oil lamp whose feeble glow revealed the face of a small boy with a tangle of thick black hair and round, wild child-eyes.

The first three moved deftly, depositing their burdens in a little pile on the patio. Their features were cloaked in darkness, for light from the lamp seemed a world unto itself, confined to the boy's face, compressed and held there by the solidity of the night.

Horton frowned. This, of course, was a ceremony. A plea, perhaps, to some strange god, or an attempt at an ancient magic. There was nothing threatening here.

But why didn't Lieutenant Perkins signal? Why—

Light !

A blinding white explosion of light that seemed to cover all the universe with its brilliancy, blanketing every atom, seeping into the remotest corners of darkness. It was the light of a hundred suns, a light so intense it seemed that night must be destroyed forever.

There was no heat, really, and no wind. Only a weak gust of air, soft as breath and warm as breath. There was no sound save a faint hissing, as of air escaping from a valve.

But a moment later the light died as quickly as it had come. Darkness swept in like air in to a vacuum.

Blinded, Horton sank to his knees. He dug his palms into hot eyes, trying to rub away the searing whiteness that still clung to his vision, trying to thrust it back into the night. He blinked furiously. The

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whiteness dissolved to be replaced by great, undulating bands of fiery red, an impenetrable veil separating him from the others and imprisoning him.

He sat motionless for five minutes, ten minutes, his eyes closed. At last he opened them. There was darkness, but it was the welcome darkness of Somiam night. Ahead was the stone house, its door still open. To his left were Perkins and Green; to his right, Gottlieb and Lopez and Chang.

He breathed deeply. He was not blind. Nothing had changed. They were still soldiers and still conquerors.

And the enemy was still here.

Lieutenant Perkins signaled. Green crept to the rear of the house; Chang took his station in front with his portable video.

Lieutenant Perkins signalled again. There was a scurring, a swift brushing of bodies against wheat. Shapes darted through the darkness, black little knots of tension in the relaxed, quiet, cool Somian night. It was all very methodical now, very efficient. They were still soldiers and still conquerors, and therefore they were not afraid.

But Horton thought, " My God, this is it, this is really it."

And he and Lieutenant Perkins barged toward the open doorway, fingers on the triggers of their R-rifles. He felt as if he were treading on a gigantic balloon that would explode at any instant, blinding him as the strange, terrible light blinded him, and ripping him apart, too. Closer and closer to the door. Closer and closer.

Abruptly, they were inside.

The Somians looked calmly up at them.

An old man with a bald, wrinkled skull and a thin red beard smiled at them. He was squatting on the stone floor, clad in a robe-like garment of white, his pipe-stem arms folded.

" Good evening," he said softly, nodding. " We were wondering how long you would wait outside."

A raven-haired girl, reclining on the fuzzy white skin of a zlith, put down an ancient volume she had been reading, carefully inserting the long leaf of a swamp rose between two pages of parchment. She gazed at them, smiling.

A young man of about twenty stood behind her, stiffly, smiling, too. In his hands was a small knife and a bamboo-like reed. He was, evidently, carving a Somian flute.

And squatting beside him was the boy-child, with the wide eyes of one who expects good things. His smile made Horton's gaze tremble and drop to the floor.

Then Horton saw the weapons—or what had been weapons, the

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incredible, nameless defenses of the Somian civilization. A tangled bulk of charred, twisted tubes and coils and mirrors, so black it seemed they had been held in the flames of the sun. What manner of weapons they had been, Horton knew not.

Gottlieb and Lopez tramped into the room.

Gottlieb said, saluting, "We searched the other rooms. Everyone's here, Lieutenant."

Perkins grunted. He saw the weapons, kicked at them. "What's this?"

"Our weapons," replied the old man.

"What happened to them?"

"We destroyed them."

Lieutenant Perkins blinked. "You what?"

"We destroyed them. You saw us destroy them just a few minutes ago, outside. We brought them inside so you would be sure to see them." The old Somian smiled. "You see, they were far superior to yours. We did not want you to learn their secrets."

"You did not want—" Lieutenant Perkins made a contemptuous, spluttering sound.

"It's a trick," said Gottlieb.

"Search the house!" Lieutenant Perkins commanded. "They have weapons, I'm sure of that!"

Gotliebt and Lopez and Horton searched, tapping the stone walls and floors, moving the old heavy volumes from stone shelves, digging into bins of Somian wheat, into chests full of strange things: flutes, carvings of robed men with beards, curious collections of oddly-shaped disks, silver and gold models of swamp boats, delicate paintings of Somian life—signed by an artist who died 30,000 years ago.

At last they returned to Lietenant Perkins.

"We found no weapons," said Horton.

"They have hidden them," said Gottlieb. "They are in the wheat fields, or under the Wall, or in the swamps."

The red-bearded Somian shook his head. "No, those were our only weapons. We destroyed them."

"If you destroyed them," said Lieutenant Perkins, "how can you fight."?

"We—those behind the Wall—have decided not to fight a war."

"Then you surrender?"

The old man smiled, patiently. "We do not surrender because we have never been at war. Our weapons were greater than yours; we could have destroyed your planet. And yet there are many, many more of you. The result would have been a balance. Both races would have perished."

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"But this is war. We've invaded your country!"

The dark-eyed Somian girl stepped forward. "You have been afraid of us. You have said that you must attack us before we attack you. Now you see that we will not attack anyone. We hope you will leave."

"This is a Somian trick," said Gottlieb.

Lieutenant Perkins was silent for a few seconds. He looked helpless, like a child confronted with the unfamiliar spectre of death.

Finally he snapped to Horton, "Get Chang in here! Have him call H.Q.! Find out what's going on!"

A moment later Chang entered, adjusted his portable video and clamped ear-phones to his head. Soon he said, "It's like this everywhere, Leiutenant, everywhere inside the Wall."

"Maybe it isn't a trick," said Horton. "Maybe it's the real thing."

Lieutenant Perkins snorted. "Impossible! They wouldn't—"

"Look there, Lieutenant," said Lopez, "there, out the window." He pointed. "It's a flash of light, a long ways away, like the one that blinded us. And over there! There's another—and another!"

Gottlieb said, "If this isn't a trick, then these people are crazy." He frowned thoughtfully. "Of course! Any people, living in stone houses and using oil lamps when they have atomics, would have to be crazy—damned crazy."

"Or damned wise," said Horton.

Lieutenant Perkins wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. Suddenly laughter broke from his lips. He laughed his deep, rolling, hysterical laughter until it was a dark, evil cloud tumbling through the stone rooms and out into the cool, clean night.

Then it froze, sucked away by the impartial night and the silent, staring faces.

His upper lip twitched. A flushed defiance entered his features.

"Cowards!" he barked. "Cowards and fools! Don't you know what it means not to fight? We'll take your homes, we'll make you slaves!"

The old red-bearded Somian rose, slowly. Ever so slowly, smiling. "We don't think you will," he said.

Lieutenant Perkins spat, "We'll do worse than that. We'll kill you."

The Somian kept smiling.

"We'll kill you!" screamed Lieutenant Perkins, brandishing his R-rifle.

The smile widened.

Poof!

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The old man fell, clutching the nothingness where his stomach had been.

The young man with the half-carved flute stiffened, biting his lip. Hatred flamed briefly in his eyes, very briefly, a pinpoint of hatred existing for a pinpoint of time. It vanished, and he took a deep breath.

"We knew this might happen," he said. "It is better for some of us to be killed than all of us. It is better for all our race to be killed than both races."

Time seemed to have stopped. Thought and movement came slowly now, like limbs walking under water.

Finally Gottlieb said, "This is no trick, and these people are not crazy." His words came hard, as if each were a leaden weight cast reluctantly from his tongue. He looked weary and confused.

Horton said, "It is good. There will be no war now, and no more conquering and killing, and no need for an army."

"No need for an army—" Lieutenant Perkins ran a trembling hand over his white, sweat-beaded face. "Then—then what will we do?"

No one answered.

Lopez said, a kind of terror in his voice, "What will we do?"

The question hung in the still air, an ominous, undying, thousand-voiced echo. Lieutenant Perkins and Horton and Gottlieb and Green and Chang and Lopez were suddenly like lost, frightened children.

Then Horton turned to the young Somian man, a prayer forming in his wide eyes. "Perhaps," he murmured, "perhaps you could, teach us what to do?"

For a long, long moment there was silence. The Somian's gaze travelled slowly over the Earthmen. It was an X-Ray gaze, penetrating exploring, analyzing.

At last he glanced at the Somian girl and at the boy-child, and they smiled at him, and then he too smiled and nodded at Horton.

"Yes," he said, "I think we can teach you."

Edward W. Ludwig

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By 1949 Breen had become the nerve centre of one of the most closely guarded espionage systems the world had ever known. Despite this he is more lonely than ever as his closest associates are sent on various assignments—and his mental abilities go on increasing in power.

WILD TALENT

By Wilson Tucker

Illustrated by QUINN

Conclusion

FOREWORD

Paul Breen's latent telepathic talent first began developing in 1934 *when he was thirteen years old. While at the Chicago Exposition he witnesses the shooting of a G-man and picks up information both from the dying man's mind and from those of the killers. Anonymously informing Washington in a letter he starts a nation-wide secret search for himself, but the Federal Bureau of Investigation do not catch up with him until he is inducted into the Army in* 1945, *when his fingerprints are checked and match those on the letters he sent.*

FBI official Ray Palmer and CIC operator Peter Conklin investigate his mental abilities and take him by train to Washington where it is thought his powers will be useful in spotting spies and traitors. While on the train Breen picks up the thoughts of a fellow passenger who is suspicious of their party—and is also thinking about something called an atomic bomb. Paul reports this information which is eventually relayed to higher authority and a dragnet is put out to apprehend the man, but although Paul can " see " where the man is hiding, he

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doesn't know in which city he is located in. From a distance Paul mentally keeps in touch with th man, and realises that at the same time he can "watch" almost everyone he has met and spoken to. Their thoughts and actions are like an open book to him.

In Washington Paul becomes virtually a prisoner under the jurisdiction of Slater and Carnell, both of whom are directly responsible only to the President. His secret is closely guarded—only seven people know of his telepathic talent. Although he has everything he could wish for he is closely guarded in an hotel apartment and all guests are screened before he meets them. At a party in his apartment he meets a blonde named Karen and forms an attachment for her despite the fact that he knows she has been put in to spy on him. His closest friend is now Peter Conklin who is his constant companion and he has a certain liking for Carnell whom he often sees, but of Slater he can learn very little—the man keeps out of his way, relaying orders through Carnell. Somewhere in the back of Slater's mind is an intriguing reference to a man named Willis, but Paul cannot trace the reasoning.

In 1949 *the somewhat casual life of mentally spying on everyone who comes to Washington ends abruptly. Reports show that more than one country are now interested in the possibility of atomic explosions. America must find out just how far advanced these countries are with their experiments. The plan is for Paul to read the minds of operators sent on foreign missions (he now knows that he can keep in mental touch with anyone he has met wherever they are in the world), and report to Slater hours or days before code messages would get through. Conklin is one of the first to be chosen—his destination, Russia.*

Before he goes, however, he and Paul are sent to check on a new ambassador. Paul is to scan his mind as the car enters the embassy gates. Together with two guards they leave for the assignment, but Paul has a sense of impending disaster as the car they are riding in nears the scene of the investigation. He checks the street, the car, but his mind cannot find what is wrong. A hot pain continually stabs at the back of his neck—he feels that whatever is coming will come from behind. With the car parked they walk the remaining short distance as the ambassador's car comes into sight. Conklin a step in front of Breen, one of the guard's immediately behind him.

As the embassy car slows for the drive entrance Paul gets a fleeting thought and dashes his two companions to the path as a gun explodes across the street. A second shot finds its mark in him . . . and three miles away a girl screames with horror at the scene on the pavement.

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XI.

1949

He opened his eyes to find himself in his own bed, in his own room, and saw Karen.

"Well, hi . . ." he said weakly, happily.

She sat beside the bed, looking into his face.

"Glad you changed your mind."

She wore a quizzical expression.

"About coming back," he explained.

Karen smiled slightly. "The old order changeth."

Paul grinned at her. "They missed me."

"Sure they did." There was an edge to her voice.

"They missed the spinal column by a good half inch. No need to worry at all."

"They missed;" he reminded her. "What more could I want?"

She didn't answer, only sat there staring at him. The room was quiet. He moved his head slowly and saw they were alone. A nearby table held a glass and a pitcher of water, a tray, and some bottles. Behind the tray he saw the end loops of a pair of surgical scissors and bandage dressing. A tall vase held a half-dozen yellow roses.

"Never bothered much about flowers." He rolled his head back to her and experienced an ache in his neck. "But I like the yellow ones better than the red ones."

She smiled her thanks.

He rested, lying on his back with his face turned to hers, content to lie there and watch her. After a while his thoughts returned to the street scene and what had happened there.

"Gordon?" he asked.

"Gordon is being buried this afternoon."

"But . . ." The surprise was evident on his face.

"You were shot the night before last." The edgy tone had returned to her voice. "You've been out of circulation, mister."

Paul considered that. "Peter? And the others?"

"All okay. Only you and Gordon."

"Did they find anybody?"

She shook her head. "You'll have to ask Peter or Mr. Carnell about the details. I know very little, and I don't talk about what I do know."

Paul studied her. After some moments he said, "Something's happened to you, Karen. There's a change."

"I came back," she said quietly.

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"And that took guts," he added.

She searched his face for information. "I suspect you know more than I had believed. About . . . things."

Paul tried to nod and found the taped neck forbade it. "I've picked up a bit here and there. Carnell added a few things. I'm awfully glad you came back."

"Perhaps I should apologize, but I'd rather not talk about it."

"No apologies needed; I know it was forced, and we won't talk about it. Nice day isn't it?" He couldn't see the windows from his position on the bed and so she grinned crookedly at him.

"It's raining."

"I say it's nice. You're here."

"Thank you, sir." Karen dipped her head.

"You *can* tell me something. Did you know what happened there on the street? How far away were you?"

"Several blocks. We heard the shooting—guessed it was your party. I turned around and drove back as quickly as I could. Forrie and Peter were putting you in the car."

"Several blocks?" he questioned. Then suddenly, "Did you scream?"

"Scream?"

"Yes, did you? When the shots were fired, or when you arrived?"

"No. I didn't scream."

"Someone did. A woman. I heard her."

"Probably a neighbour across the street."

"Maybe. I'll ask Peter."

Karen stood up. "I'd better call him, and the doctor. They're downstairs eating a late lunch. I was supposed to call them instantly if you awoke." She paused as she was crossing the room and turned to look back over her shoulder. "I wanted a few moments with you alone. Don't give me away."

For answer, he put an imaginary kiss on the tip of his finger and flicked it at her. She pretended to catch it and place it on her lips, then continued on to the door. He watched her blonde hair as it disappeared from sight and then listened to the sounds of her shoes descending the stairway.

Paul relaxed and lay staring at the ceiling. The full vivid picture of the street ambush came back to him, and he considered the gun that had been planted on the back of his head. That gun had been waiting for him for a long time—from the moment the party left the house on the Pike. From before that moment actually, because he had realized danger as soon as he emerged from the house and entered the Packard; the danger had been unrecognized, he didn't know

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then that it was a gun, but he knew something was lurking there. At first he had made the same mistake as Conklin in supposing that the danger would come from the embassy car, or perhaps the embassy itself. But instead it had come from some other place along the block or across the street, and it had been waiting for him. Waiting for him to arrive at that precise spot. First time out of the house in two or three years, and the gun was waiting for him.

So the gun really must have been waiting for a very long time. In the literal sense. It had been waiting for all of those two or three years he lived in the house; until now he had never ventured beyond the grounds. That gun *might* have been waiting for him since the day he first arrived in Washington, in 1945—or any time thereafter. The fact that there had been no early attempt suggested it had been waiting only the last few years, since his taking up residence at the house on the Pike. It also very obviously suggested that the man behind the gun knew where he was going and when he would be there. Unless the people in the embassy had his twin, his counterpart hidden within their walls, they knew nothing of his coming. And were out of it.

Eleven men in Wahington knew what he was, where he was, and what he was doing. Which of the eleven was the man behind the gun? Or had placed a marksman there?

Were there more than eleven? Had someone talked?

The door opened suddenly and Paul looked up in surprise. Conklin came in, followed by a second man who must be the doctor.

"Hallo!" Conklin called out. "Glad to see you up and around—" He caught the expression on Paul's face. "What's the matter?"

"I didn't hear you coming," Paul said.

"The door was closed. And I'm not an elephant." Suddenly he stopped in midstride as a new thought twisted across his mind, registering on his face as alarm. "Paul! You—didn't?"

"No."

"*Try*, Paul. Now. Try me!" Conklin waited, forcing rapid thoughts at the man lying on the bed.

Paul shook his head. "No," he repeated. "I'm sorry, Peter. Nothing. It's like . . . like a radio suddenly turned off."

Conklin asked desperately, "Everything blank?" He turned and ran from the room.

The doctor stood beside the bed, mystified. "Now what was that all about?" He reached for the pulse. "How do you feel young man?" He took out his watch and began counting to himself.

Paul listened to the count echoing in the doctor's mind and held back a smile.

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Carnell reached the house in less than half a hour. He was panting from the exertion of running up the stairs, and the growing alarm on his face went far beyond that exhibited by Conklin. The two of them sat beside the bed, pumping him, seeking to encourage him.

"I don't know when it started—I mean stopped," Paul protested again. "It never occurred to me to read Karen. When I woke up and found her here, I just said a few words and she answered me, then went to call the doctor. I didn't try to look into her mind. Everything seemed all right until Peter opened the door. I hadn't heard him, hadn't realized he was standing on the other side of the door. First time it ever failed."

"What about now?" Carnell anxiously pressed him. "What about Peter and myself? Aren't you getting anything?"

"Nothing."

"Jehoshaphat!" Carnell smacked his fist into the bed. "Is this the end of it all?"

"Will you keep trying, Paul? Try hard?" Conklin turned to Carnell. "Where's Slater? He should know about this."

"He's in San Francisco; something urgent came up. I've wired him. He's coming back as soon as possible."

"I'm curious about a couple of things," Paul said after a short silence. "That street shooting. Did you find anything?"

"Some," Conklin told him glumly. "We located the house, the room and the window the gunman was hiding in. For all the good it did us. The people owning the house have been gone for months—since Labour Day. Wintering in Arizona. The gunman forced a basement window in the rear and entered the house that way. But he didn't so much as leave an empty shell or a cigarette butt."

"Sounds like a smart operator."

"Damned smart! We know he went in, we know he fired two shots at you, we know he left. We know nothing else."

"Nothing more than that?" Paul asked sharply.

They stared at him curiously. "What do you mean?"

"Eleven men know about me. Only eleven."

"We thought of that, too," Carnell informed him. "Our first thought, almost. And we checked on the location of every one of those eleven. All accounted for."

"The gunman knew I was coming," Paul reminded them.

"I realize that; it's been giving us trouble. And we can't account for it. All we can do is watch the eleven; there is the bare possibility that one of them has talked. We're checking into that." He spread his hands. "Of course, there are one or two men we *can't* grill, but we can ask discreet questions and then weigh the answers."

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" Paul," Conklin said then, " if only this new thing hadn't happened to you, if this blackness hadn't occurred, *you* could check the eleven fast enough."

" I know. I've thought of that."

" Well, what are we going to do?"

" Nothing much to do," Paul responded, " except sit and wait. Let's see what happens next. Maybe Roy, or that doctor can explain it."

" I'll ask Roy immediately, but not the doctor. I object to a twelfth person joining the club!" Carnell jumped up from his chair to pace the floor. " Damn it all, Peter, this is a disaster."..

Conklin nodded dully. " I'm afraid so."

" How in the world could it ever happen?" Carnell demanded savagely of no one.

Paul said, " He must have used a rifle. And had good eyesight."

" He probably had a sniperscope on it," Conklin put in. " It was rather dark along that street and he picked you out too neatly, considering the distance. Did you notice the absence of loud noises? The rifle was equipped with a muffler or baffle of some sort. I wish I could lay my hands on him!" He grinned weakly. " Next time I'll trust your hunches, boy. You said he was behind us."

" There won't be a next time," Carnell contradicted flatly. " Paul isn't going out of this house until . . . until . . . well, until whatever." He paused in his frantic pacing to frown with new thought. " You know, there has been talk downtown of building a new place, a really big establishment. Somewhere over on the Chesapeake shore. We have some property over there which was used as a training centre during the war. What happened night before last will probably cinch it." He stopped again and looked at Paul. " If——"

" If I'm any use to anyone after this," Paul finished for him.

Carnell said absently, " Yeah."

Paul turned his attention back to Conklin. " Peter, when it happened, were there any women around?"

" Not to my knowledge. Oh, Karen was there, but she didn't arrive until after it was over. Why?"

" I wondered who screamed."

Conklin closed his eyes, going over the scene. " I didn't hear a woman scream."

" Someone did, though. I heard it. Just after the second shot."

" I didn't."

Carnell stopped beside him. " Could there be anything in it?"

" We found no evidence of a woman in the house. Not in recent months, that is. But I'll check with Gates and our driver." Conklin was looking at Paul. " Can you tell me anything about the scream?"

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"No . . . I don't think so. It was just a scream. I don't know where it came from."

"*How* did you hear it?" Conklin asked suddenly.

"How?"

"With your ears, or otherwise?"

Paul stopped to consider that, quite surprised with the suggestion. "Well," he said finally, "I don't know. I was seeking that gun. I had the impression of a window and the muzzle of the thing, and I thought I saw a finger moving on the trigger. That's when I warned you a second shot was coming. He got me then—it burned like sin. I thought that if I dropped my head and played dead, the gunman would quit. That's when I heard the scream, but I don't know *how* I heard it. And then I passed out, I guess."

"It must have been a silent scream," Conklin mused.

"Now hold up a minute; let's follow this thing through," Carnell persisted. "Let's assume for the moment that a woman *was* hiding somewhere along that street. Or had been strolling along and ran into hiding when the trouble started. She would have to be a witness to the shooting to scream at the proper moment, wouldn't she? Yes. Now let's assume that it was what you call a silent scream, one which was emitted by the mind instead of the lips. So—Paul, it would be easy for you to hear that, wouldn't it? We never had to speak to you unless we wished, eh?"

"That's true. But I'd have to know the woman, the same as the people I've met here. At least, I would had had to meet her once or twice and take some interest in her. I couldn't work on strangers—that's why we were going to see the embassy man."

"Precisely! If you heard a woman scream mentally, it follows that you had previously met her. And if you did hear a woman scream at that place and at that time, she must have seen you shot. Do you see my line of supposition?"

"Yep. Finish it."

Conklin interrupted. "It would suggest some female of Paul's acquaintance was there on the spot."

"That's my point," Carnell snapped. "Who?"

"He knows two. Emily and Karen." Conklin turned to the patient. "Who else?"

Watching him, Paul said slowly, "My landlady and some old girl friends back home. The telephone girls downstairs. And there is the slight possibility that I can read some of the women who worked in the hotel downtown—I didn't see much of them, but I remember a few faces.

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"That," Carnell said emphatically, turning to Conklin, "is our next line of research."

"I was afraid of that."

"Why?" Carnell asked sharply. "Are you worried about Emily and Karen?"

"No—not really. I'm sure of Emily. And Karen was driving the tip-off car; we know where she was." He looked up. "But you can't be sure of Emily, as I am. You don't know where she was. And so she's under suspicion."

"Don't worry about it," Carnell said in a kinder tone. "We'll do it gently. I'll put Karen on it." He resumed pacing the floor. "Hell, I'm not worried about her. I know her like my own daughter. Well, almost. But what about these other women? The three downstairs? I'll start a routine check back in Illinois, but I imagine we can rule out the landlady and the old flames. See where that leaves us?"

"Downstairs or the hotel."

"Yeah."

Paul broke in, "All this is only supposition."

"But a damned good one!" Carnell declared. "And what else can we do? We're turning the city upside down now to find that rifleman. We've already started checking the eleven people who are wise to you—and let me tell you one thing! It'll be rough on the man who can't account for his whereabouts the evening before last."

"Where were you?" Paul asked with a grin.

"In my office. Waiting for Peter's report on what happened at the embassy."

"I never did get to see the man coming in," Paul said ruefully.

"But he saw you," Carnell retorted. "The whole lot of you. Somebody down at State had to soothe his ruffled feelings. Had to convince him that gangsters and capitalists weren't shooting it out on his front doorstep." Carnell suddenly grinned. "I wonder what kind of report he sent home?"

"You don't know?" Paul asked.

Carnell gave him a curious stare and did not answer.

"You know what I'd like to do?" Paul asked.

"What?"

"I'd like to meet the man who cracked the Japanese code during the war. I read about that. I'd like to know that man."

"Why?"

"I'm curious about him. I've read some books on codes and ciphers, but I still don't understand how it is done. I'd like to know

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how to do it. If I get my—my talent back again, I'd like to see some of those people."

Carnell considered it. "We'll see."

The week wound on to its end, closed, and a new one began. The officious doctor continued to pop in and out twice a day, removing bandages, peering and probing, humming to himself just above the level of audibility, finally replacing the bandages and departing. Paul remained in bed ; the cook brought in his meals ; each of the telephone girls looked in briefly with a word as her shift ended. Conklin spent the greater part of each day in Paul's room, chatting with him or sometimes reading aloud, or at other times doing nothing more than sitting at the window staring into space. There were six fresh yellow roses daily. Karen dropped in a few times, but didn't stay long, pleading that she was extremely busy. Once she exchanged glances with Conklin, and he was miserable for hours. The strange new thing that seemed to have happened to her after the shooting episode was still there, carefully hidden in her voice and manner, but there nevertheless. After several days Conklin caught it and glanced at Paul to see if he was aware. Paul winked at him, but said nothing. Carnell came in once or twice, quite glum.

Conklin reported the progress (or lack of it) they were making on the various lines of inquiry. The reports weren't really necessary ; Paul had already followed each of them to its ultimate end and knew that none of the women under suspicion was actually involved, but he continued to play his game and let Conklin make the verbal reports. Those women living in Washington were not on the street that night, and Carnell would eventually discover that to his complete satisfaction. So far as he could discern, the women back in Illinois had never left the state. But one question remained unanswered in his prying mind : Who had screamed?

The shooting had awakened him to the peril.

If some of those eleven men hated him that much, hated him to a degree he was willing to murder him, it was far past time to take protective steps. The nearness to death, the awful closeness of that bullet to his brain seemed adequate cover for this deception. He would continue the spell of blankness for the moment, to allow his first peculiar talent slowly to "return." This time, rooted as it was in genuine-seeming circumstances, would set the pattern for future relapses. And perhaps in time he could convince them it was gone altogether. What would they do then?

Lying abed, he had sought the eleven too and found nothing rewarding. Conklin had been at his side and knew absolutely nothin

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of the gunman. Captain Evans had long ago been transferred to an outpost in the Pacific. Carnell *had* been downtown waiting in his office, and Slater *had* been in San Francisco in charge of a detail of men. The F.B.I. agent, Palmer, was out of town ; his two superiors who knew of Paul continued their grumbling over losing him, but knew nothing of the shooting until late at night, when someone at State routed them out of their beds. The White House had temporarily been moved to Key West during a short vacation ; while the unctuous major who ran liaison had been somewhere en route between Washington and Florida. Of the eleven, only Doctors Roy and Grennell remained, and they were the uncomfortable targets at the moment. Paul knew, if Carnell did not, that they too were innocent. That would be established shortly.

Who screamed?

And who set the rifleman on him?

Eleven men knew him and eleven men had been accounted for. Eleven minds hadn't been read, but their actions and locations had been accounted for. In time, in good time, he expected to pry deeply into every remaining one of those eleven minds not already scanned. That would come, and he was content to wait.

But who screamed?

Carnell announced one day, after Slater returned from the coast, that renovation plans for the Maryland place were being dusted off. They were waiting only to see if Paul recovered his abilities. Carnell was quite pleased with the plans. It was a magnificent old place, he said, a big Maryland mansion surrounded with acres of lawn and woods. A wonderful growth of timber—beautiful trees, setting off a beautiful estate. It had come down from Colonial times. The building was a three-story affair with tall, graceful columns, and was completely modernized. They had used it during the war. The house would be done over for them, with bulletproof glass in the windows and a high stone wall around the estate. Complete privacy. The new plans called for a cable and wireless room so they would have their own direct connections with all the world ; there would be a movie theatre, a swimming pool, a gymnasium. It would be as much fun as a picnic. If Paul recovered.

He did not say the ants would be missing. The estate would first be swept clean with a security broom, and the ants would be eliminated.

They had large plans, Slater and he. Once again the place would become a training centre, of a kind of training the world had never before known. Conklin was to be only the first of many men and

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women who would be sent out over the world, reporting back to Paul all that they saw and heard. The new agents would come to the Maryland centre and spend weeks there, undergoing rigorous training. They would be taught a new code and instructed to report by cable or wireless direct to the estate. Meanwhile, Paul would study each of them, get to know them, and thus follow them wherever they went. The new code and the cable connections were really a cover ; Paul would always know in advance the information they had unearthed, and their actual filing of messages would be a blind, designed to keep the truth from them and others. They were not to learn Paul's secret, but continue to believe that the coded messages were getting the information back. Dozens, scores of agents could be trained and dispatched. The ultimate number depended only on Paul's ability to handle them. If he recovered.

Paul instantly saw the opportunity of a second relapse. Take on, say, a dozen men, two dozen, and the overload would bring him down again. And with about the third collapse—*finis*. Get out of this mess.

Paul was out of bed and sitting in a chair reading Roy's *Studies* when Karen came in. He had been getting up for short periods of time over the past few days, and now he felt strong enough to spend an afternoon in the chair.

" Hi," he called. " Why stop to knock?"

" I try to be polite always." She sat down on the edge of the bed and looked at him. " How are you, chick? You seem healthy."

" I am healthy. Want proof?"

" Not right now, thank you. Ask again later on."

Paul grinned. " Don't think I won't."

" I know you will." She matched his grin. " I can remember your grandfather. Now there was a wild one!"

" Grandpappy hasn't been doing much lately. They caught him teaching the Indians how to brew their own rotgut and put him away for a while."

" Oh, that's too bad. He was such a nice, harmless old man."

" He's probably broken out by this time. I haven't heard from him for months—mail's a bit slow, you know."

" Yes." Karen leaned back on the bed, laughing at him. " You've recovered. May as well pay the doctor bill and send him packing." She displayed a slim and inviting appearance.

" What's with you?" he wanted to know.

" Work," she answered, " work, work, work. Mr. Slater and Mr. Carnell are slave drivers. Lucky you, lolling around in bed."

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Paul rubbed the back of his neck and said, "Sure." He gazed at her ankles and then lifted his eyes to her face. "I know a little bit about Emily. Peter was quite worried. Did it come out all right?"

Karen frowned. "I—I'm not supposed to talk about such things. Even to people I know as well as you."

"All right. Do you remember the day you were here and he had the miseries? Give me your opinion on something. Do you think his miseries are over?"

She burst into laughter. "Yes, you persistent man. I think his miseries were quite groundless."

"Glad to hear it. I like Peter and Emily, like them very much. Now he'll be fit to live with again." He had a new thought. "Say, are you staying awhile this time?"

She moved her head. "Perhaps an hour or so."

"Fine! Open that closet door." He pointed behind him. Karen obediently arose from the bed and went to the closet, opened it to reveal the liquor rack.

"Oh, now," she exclaimed, "does the doctor allow this?"

"If he doesn't, he should. He's been helping himself for the past two weeks. Trot it out."

"Well, maybe just a little one . . ."

She stayed well over an hour, and once expressed the wish that his room were equipped with a radio and that he were on his feet again. He promised both the next time she should visit him. Karen said she thought she would be free the coming weekend, and Paul snapped her up on it. He even offered to sing, now, if she would dance for him.

"Can you sing?" she asked.

"Well . . ."

"Never mind. That's answer enough. Forget it." And humming aloud, she did a few steps about the floor. He applauded and asked for more. She declined, saying she preferred to wait until he could join her. And thus they passed the hour, and more.

When at last she had to go, she bent down quickly and kissed his lips. "That's for the other day," she said.

"I wish I had thrown you a handful," he complained, reaching for her. Karen moved back our of the way.

"Silly! I really must go now." She paused in the doorway and smiled at him. "Do you want anything?"

Paul winked at her. "But I can't have it. So just ask Peter to come up, will you?"

"See you this weekend. 'Bye." And she was gone.

Conklin came through the open door a few moments later. "A cloud," he said, pointing downward. "A pink, fluffy cloud, and she

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was floating along in the middle of it. What's on your mind, Don Juan?"

"Karen's in love with me."

"I've known that for days. Did she just get around to telling you?"

"No, she didn't tell me. Not aloud. But she told me."

"You were blind not to see it before. Hey—wait a minute!" He stared at Paul. "You *read* it?"

"Yep."

Conklin turned and jumped down the stairs for the telephone.

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XII.

The first real touch of spring had come and the windows were open, not yet covered by screens. The cook's carefully tended plants were budding in the yard, and early birds had been making noises for weeks, impatiently awaiting the warmer weather. Peter Conklin stood in the middle of Paul's room, looking around at all the small familiar objects, picking out his favourite chair. His darting eyes finally came to rest on Paul.

"Well, so long." He held out his hand, displaying an awkwardness that was new to him. "I don't know what to say, except that it has been fun."

Paul grasped the hand and squeezed it. "Take care, Peter. And be careful of all the Spaniards in all the streets. You know . . . ?"

"I know and I will. Very careful." He hesitated, searching the other's face. "I don't suppose you've changed your mind? About our meeting again?"

"No, I'm sorry. Slater hasn't changed his mind, and I see nothing whatever. It just isn't there."

"That's what I thought. And all along I've been hoping you were wrong. Damn—what a lousy place to go! That's the trouble with this job. Emily threw a scene."

"Tough on her, all right." Paul nodded, and suddenly smiled at him. "If it's any comfort to you, just remember that you can talk to me all the time. Any time, day or night, I don't care. I can't answer, but don't let that stop you. And Peter—don't move your lips. People will think you're touched."

"Won't they, though! I'm glad I was in on the beginning of this. Of you. Else I would suspect I was touched." He made a last careful survey of the room. "Well, the car's waiting for me. I'm going directly to the station and taking a train for Newark. It looks like this is the end of four years." He hesitated once again, glancing at Paul, and it was obvious what was on his mind. Paul waited for it to be spoken.

"Do you remember what you asked me several weeks ago, Paul? About doing a favour without mentioning it downtown?"

"I remember."

"Well—I'm going directly to the train, I'm not going back to the office."

Paul let his gaze drift across the room, examining the wallpaper. Then he snapped back to the waiting man. "I was hoping you'd do it, Peter. It won't involve you in any trouble if you're careful. When your plane touches down at Shannon, I'd like for you to make a

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few inquiries for me. Nose around below the surface and see what you can find out about a man. I think he's in Ireland somewhere."

Conklin laughed in relief. "Is that all? What's the man's name?"

"Walter Willis."

"Willis?" The agent frowned at that. "You mentioned him before; a long time ago, I believe."

"Yep. And be careful about it, Peter. The man might not like the idea of your poking into his business."

"All right, if that's all." He laughed again. "And I had supposed you wanted somebody killed. Who is this Willis?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out. I'm hoping you'll turn up something." He shrugged as if to dismiss it. "I picked up the name years ago when we were living in the hotel. It's been on my mind.'

"Well, I should think so. Four years. All right, I'll see what I can do, but it won't be much. It's only a four or five hour wait between planes."

"Not much of a chance, I realize that. I thought maybe you could find a quick contact somewhere around."

"I'll try." The awkwardness had returned. "Well, the car's waiting and I've got to make that train." He shook hands again. "May as well cut it short." He turned and walked away.

Paul waited, watching him.

Conklin paused for a moment in the doorway and looked back. "So long, Cro-Magnon."

Paul waved. "Good-bye, Neanderthal."

Conklin vanished from the doorway and strode rapidly down the stairs. Someone in the lower hallway said a few words and then closed the door after him. Through the open window of the room came the sounds of the car shifting gears and then rolling down the drive. Paul had turned about and was staring down at the lawn below. That was the last he would see of Peter Conklin.

Within a few days Carnell moved into the adjoining bedroom and began picking up the reins.

Paul reported to him each thing the absent agent saw and did, reported the progress he was making in reaching his destination, and Carnell was delighted with the smoothness of the arrangements. It pleased him that the ever-increasing distance between the two men raised no barrier and that Paul was able to follow his every move. This in turn activated other plans. Slater ordered work started on the Maryland training centre and began choosing the first few men who would report there.

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"A real picnic!" Carnell repeated.

"But you aren't going to the picnic, are you?"

Carnell dropped a pencil, staring at Paul. "What do you mean?"

"You won't be going to the Maryland place."

Carnell seemed uneasy. "Why do you say that?"

"Because I think that." Paul's manner was casual and straightforward. He had never been as friendly with the man as he had been with Conklin, though they got along well enough. "Your anxiety has been showing these past few days, and I've picked up the impression you're packing your bags."

"Well, there *has* been some discussion about a flying visit to Tokyo. Slater broached the subject. We're in for trouble over there. Have you been reading the papers lately?"

"China? Yes."

"It's more than just China, I'm afraid." He rubbed his face nervously. "The Chinese Reds took Nanking last week—and there are no indications they're stopping there. But our men have found out other things; we have been receiving reports from farther north. Frankly, Paul, we expect a hell of a lot of trouble somewhere soon. Slater believes I should fly over for an inspection."

"A dollar says you won't come back."

"*What?*"

"Hold on—I didn't mean that the way it sounded." Paul hitched his chair around to face Carnell. "I'll tell you what I told Peter, and he didn't find it so hard to believe. One by one, Slater is removing the people I know here and associate with. Those who've become my friends. Peter was sent off first; one of these days you'll be sent to Tokyo or some remote place. And then Karen will go, on one pretext or another. And perhaps Emily." Paul picked up the fallen pencil and tapped the chair with emphasis. His expression gave little hint of his cold anger. "When I'm moved out there to the Maryland place and spliced to a maze of cables, these bodyguards and the switchboard girls will be left behind. There will be new personnel—none but strangers there. And Slater, alone."

"You're crazy!" Carnell declared.

"I might be at that," Paul agreed. "But let's wait and see, huh?"

"What would be the purpose to all that?"

"I thought I was making myself clear. But ask Slater, the mastermind. His purpose is to remove or eliminate that which he can't fully control, and my sudden appearance was a factor he couldn't adequately control to his liking. In Peter's case it was the growing fear of our friendship and the possibility that his loyalty might be transferred to me. Peter was free with his opinions, and his thoughts

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on the matter failed to coincide with those of Slater. Slater specializes in cold, efficient service. He rules out the emotions. Therefore he doesn't care to have me surrounded with friendly people ; he would much prefer those with attitudes similar to his. Do you recall that first day in his office? How bitter he was?"

"Of course."

"Slater hasn't changed—not an iota. He doesn't want anything changed. So Peter was sent away, and you will be sent away."

"You're crazy," the agent said without conviction.

"I'll put up a dollar cash."

One day in June, Conklin unexpectedly slipped across a distant border. It was night on the other side of the world, and he made the passage safely under cover of darkness. A hard, stinging rain washed away his tracks, and the border guards with their watch-dogs missed him. Paul walked into the basement gymnasium and found Carnell exercising there, to tell him the news.

He watched Conklin more closely thereafter, carefully observing his every move and peering into every face Conklin saw. Because the distant man travelled more freely at night, Paul adopted the habit of retiring to his room about noon each day and relaxing on the bed. Usually from about noon until nine or ten in the evening he would lie quietly, shutting out the noises of the house and the outside world, to watch and listen to the roving Conklin. But as dawn rose over there and the espionage agent went into hiding, Paul relaxed vigilance and kept watch with but half a mind. Sometimes, before falling off to sleep, Conklin would send back a purely personal message to him or Emily and at the same time wonder if he was being heard. Those messages were always heard, but could never be passed on to the girl.

Paul lay full length on the bed, asking the ceiling, *Who screamed?*

The rifleman had never been found, nor had there appeared a telltale mental trace of the man responsible for placing him there. Over a period of time Paul had had the opportunity to examine at near or far range every man but two, and none of those nine had any prior knowledge of the ambush. The two remaining men had not yet been reached and read. Slater remained the elusive mind, as always ; and Paul had not been back to the White House. Speculating, he was more than inclined to eliminate one of the remaining pair of questions marks, leaving only Slater. Slater held that much hate for him.

Who was the woman who had screamed?

For no other reason than to exercise his mind, he cast about in time and space for those persons he had previously known, however

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short a while. His former captain of course—no losing him. Evans was sweating it out on a sun-baked island and cursing the day he was born. He was also cursing the fact the island contained no women. And Palmer—there he was, in Chicago. Palmer was going over bookkeeping records of some nature, squinting at them and nursing his bad knee. Next were the two men of years ago : the former sergeant and the man to whom he had sold his information. Both in jail. The sergeant was—what? Oh, he was mulling a plan for an escape. Paul looked closer and saw that it was the hundredth plan for the hundredth escape. Wishful thinking. Now there had been a man and woman on the train . . . Something about a vacation in a mountain cabin. Where were they? ???? They weren't. He sat up in bed, startled. They couldn't be found, either of them. Had his grasp of them been so tenuous? He had read them easily enough on the train and again a few days later when they occupied the cabin. Since then there had been no occasion to look in on them. And now they were gone from his reach. *That was a lesson.* The vague ones slipped away with time ; it was necessary to know someone fairly well or fairly long to be able to hold on to him. Paul lay back on the bed, considering that.

Surely *she* hadn't been the one who screamed in the night? It wasn't likely that he had scanned her then, but was totally unable to locate her now. It didn't follow. And too, she had not exhibited a deeper interest in him other than as a mirage companion to her pleasures. Perhaps she had never again thought of him after leaving the train.

Who else did he know?

There was Karen, driving a car ; and, briefly, Emily. The oily major was somewhere playing billiards, while his boss posed for pictures on a wide lawn, surrounded by Girl Scouts. Carnell was in the next room. Slater was—where? Well now, *that* must be the Maryland mansion. Huge place. And the swimming pool was going in over there. Paul turned his attention away. A large library, and the Doctors Roy and Grennell were pursuing their new-found work to its ultimate end. Paul grinned at the sight of them. They were now engaged in running paper tests on the limit of his theoretical powers. Slater wanted to know and Slater had demanded answers. Could he move a block of wood, a pencil, a paper clip, Roy demanded of Grennell? Grennell spread his hands and wore an expression.

Telekinesis.

Paul moved his head on the pillow and looked across the room. Roy's volume stood in its place in the bookcase, and atop the case was a dust rag left behind by the housekeeper. He closed his eyes

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and concentrated on the cloth. After a moment he opened them again to look for the rag. It had fallen to the floor. In that distant library, Grennell pointed out there was no limit of power—on paper.

In August, the prowling Conklin relayed a startling piece of news which electrified Carnell and Slater and ultimately several other men in high positions. He had almost literally stumbled over a hidden mountain laboratory producing—they hoped—low-order atomic bombs and had barely escaped detection himself. There was no opportunity whatever to get nearer or to estimate the number of such bombs on hand; he had to be content with his distant, precarious observation point. Conklin also flashed back the general location of the laboratory, but Paul deleted that from his report.

"Where is he?" an irate Carnell demanded. "He was carefully instructed to send his location at all times! We want to know where he is."

Paul eyed him, knowing what was meant by *we*, and fervently desiring to protect Conklin. "I'm sorry, but I can't tell him anything. This is a one-way affair."

"Slater won't like it! How can we pinpoint a factory in that wilderness?"

"Maybe they took the signposts down," Paul replied laconically. "You keep watching. Find out where he is."

Paul kept careful watch.

Doctors Roy and Grennell continued to try, in vain, to see again their "patient." Carnell's recommendation that they be allowed to visit the house had resulted in one very brief visit, and since then the two men had been nearly frantic, dreaming up excuse after excuse to see him again. They were kept away. They knew nearly everything there was to know about Paul, those two, on paper, but they had no further opportunity to see him in person. They continued to speculate, to set up tests and patterns, to prove and disprove their own theories, but not even once more were they permitted to do the one thing they wanted most. Their usefulness was over, but they hadn't realized it. Only the security fetish held them in Washington; how long they would be kept there not even Slater knew.

"I am asking you to look!" Roy shrilled one day into the empty air over his head. Grennell peered at him, at first startled, and then realized what he was doing. Or attempting to do. "Look at me," Roy repeated to the four walls of their room. "I know you can see me and I am asking you to look—you there, Mr. Paul Breen!"

Grennell clasped his hands, eagerly awaiting some sign.

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Ron shook a fistful of papers. "Do you see this? Do you know what I know? I know everything about you—everything! And yet I cannot come to you. So you must come to me. To us. Come here, to this room. Do something, Paul Breen, to tell us you have come here."

He waited, impatiently. Paul did nothing. He realized that if he did anything at all, it would instantly be reported to Slater. Dr. Roy picked up a yellow pencil and slammed it down violently onto his work table. "See that, Paul Breen? Move it—*move it*, I dare you!"

From afar, Paul glanced at the pencil and did nothing. He wanted to do something, wanted very much to reward their labours in however small a way because he owed Roy a debt he could never repay. It was Roy and his book which had opened a vast new world to him and made him fully aware of himself ; Roy was, in a sense, his father as well as his mentor, and the doctor deserved a reward. But he knew he couldn't afford to touch that pencil or any other object the researchers set out for him. If he caused the pencil to roll off the table or hurtle across the distant room, the eager men would quickly tell Slater what had happened. And Slater would know the answer to the final question he was seeking.

"Roll it!" the furious doctor shouted. Grennell attempted to placate him but was shaken off. Roy picked up a handful of papers and flung them at the wall. "Fraud! You're a fraud, a fake!"

Paul mentally turned away.

In late August, Peter Conklin reported further news. He was on the move again, warily following several bulky objects which were being transported to a broad, uninhabited mountain valley. There was a growing excitement within him that was hard to suppress and it coloured his thinking. He knew what he was following, knew its purpose, and he prayed that it would fail.

In early September, unprotected by dark glasses, he witnessed a sight which nearly blinded him. And though he had supposed himself at a safe distance, the shock wave hurled him to the ground and tore the wind from his body.

Within days the Alaskan monitoring stations verified the startling event.

The President waited nearly three weeks and then made a fourteen-word announcement : "We have evidence that within recent weeks an atomic explosion occurred in the U.S.S.R."

It had happened some three years before the best technical minds expected it. They had erroneously assumed their own timetables would be followed.

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The presidential liaison officer, a suddenly not-so-casual major, appeared and pinned a decoration on the lapel of Paul's uniform which had been donned for the occasion. He made a pretty little speech about service and duty and valour, a speech which had been memorized because it had been said many times to many men for many reasons. He gave Paul an enigmatic smile and departed. Paul removed the uniform and put it away in the closet.

"Paul, you've done it!" A wildly jubilant Carnell danced about the room, discarding for once his reserved behaviour. "You've proved out. This is wonderful!" He clapped Paul's shoulder and playfully thumped his chest. "You're wonderful! We're rushing work on the Maryland thing—we can't get moving fast enough now. What a lucky find you were. And believe me, Paul, you're worth ten times over every dollar we've spent for you."

"The hell I am." Paul was unmoved.

"You certainly are. Do you know what Slater is doing this minute? He's up there on the Hill, getting a secret appropriation rammed through for you—and he has some powerful backing!" Carnell was beaming, excited. "Until now the expenses have come out of one fund or another, borrowed from here and there, but you're big time now, boy. An expense fund all your own, like the old Manhattan District. Give us one year and we'll blanket the world! Who can possibly stop us?"

"Swell. How much do I get?"

Carnell stopped the capering. "What?"

"How much of this wonderful money do I get?"

Carnell blinked at him, suddenly disturbed. "Well, I don't know, I just couldn't say off hand. Money? But haven't we given you everything you've asked for?"

"How much?" Paul insisted.

"Isn't your salary enough, Paul? We can raise it. Double it! Is there anything we can get for you? More books, perhaps? We'll fill a room with books—anything you ask for. New clothes? Now would you like a new suit?" He peered anxiously at the other, had a new thought and winked. "Oh—girls, Paul? You can have all the pretty girls you want. I'll move out of my room and bunk across the hall. We'll bring down models from New York. Just name it, man."

"How much money is Slater asking for?"

"Ah . . . five million, I believe." Carnell frowned at him, obviously worried. "For this year."

"Fine," Paul replied. "I'll take one."

"One—what?"

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"Million. For this year."

The following morning Slater sent back the answer to that. Carnell lacked the nerve to relay the answer.

A bright, cold moon shone through the window.

Paul slipped out of bed and felt for his slippers in the dimly illuminated darkness. The most agonizing headache he had ever known held him in its grip, a headache and a mood that reflected the very depths of despair. He wrapped a robe about him and moved slowly across the room toward the connecting door and the adjoining bedroom. He stopped after a few steps and turned away. Carnell wasn't in his room. Painfully, Paul mentally searched the house seeking him. He finally located the man down in the kitchen eating a snack. Paul left his room and walked quietly down the stairs, startling the girl at the switchboard by his unexpected appearance.

"Well, good morning, Mr. Breen."

He turned and moved toward the kitchen without answering her. Carnell had overheard her surprised words and came to the kitchen door. "Hello, what's the matter?"

Paul pushed him back into the kitchen and closed the door, staring at the other man with aching eyes.

"Paul, what's the matter?" Carnell repeated in alarm.

"Peter Conklin is dead," Paul said dully.

"He's *what*? How do you know?"

"A sniper got him, just a few minutes ago."

"Paul, this can't be!"

"It is."

"But how did that happen? How did they catch him? Peter is a careful man."

"Peter *was* a careful man. They came looking for him. They knew where he was and routed him out."

XIII.

1941

She was a blonde, natural blonde of a rather dark shade and not at all the glossy canescence that is so painfully artificial. He liked that and held his lips close to her hair. She still wore the bronzed tan which complemented so well the colouring of her hair and eyes but now the tan was faded from the long winter. She rested her head on his shoulder in a dispirited manner, no longer the sparkling, animated woman he had first known so many years before. Karen

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was deeply troubled. They sat alone in the basement gymnasium, she in his arms.

Her gaze moved slowly about the huge room, seeking this object or that, seeking the pleasant memories that had been.

"Remember when we batted that silly ball around, Paul? The four of us?"

"Peter batted it too hard. He knocked Emily down."

"One by one they have all gone, haven't they? The friends we loved so well."

He nodded against her head without speaking.

"Poor Peter—I shall never forget that first night I met you. He opened the door and saw me standing there. He was very surprised and almost made a rude remark. I think he would have, too, if Emily hadn't been with me."

Paul tightened his arms about her. "You were the last woman on earth he was expecting that night. It probably cured him of blind dates."

"We lost Peter first and in such a horrible way." He felt the tremor in her body. "Did you know that the shock sent Emily to the hospital? Mr. Carnell kept her there for more than a week. It was dreadful news. They were planning to be married."

"I knew that, yes."

"And then she left us. She wrote to me at first, but her letters became more and more infrequent and at last stopped altogether. She was in Chicago for a while and then Salt Lake City. I haven't had a word from her since Christmas ; just a note, really, asking me to remember all the other Christmases we spent together. That one was from San Francisco. And since then—nothing."

The big room was warm and still. From upstairs came the occasional sound of a footfall, a scraping chair; but no more. When he and Karen had descended to the gymnasium, Paul had pulled shut the door behind them, serving notice to the rest of the houshold that they wanted to be alone.

Karen said, "And then Mr. Carnell."

Paul nodded again. "Third man out."

"I was very fond of him ; he was quite warm and human, really, and not at all the cold mechanical man you would expect in such a position. He did everything he could for Emily after . . . He offered her a transfer to any part of the country she might wish, offered to do everything possible to help her. But no one can help in a situation like that, can one? I drove him to the airport the night he took off for Tokyo." Her voice was melancholy.

"And his plane plunged into the Pacific," Paul finished almost brutally. "Engine failure."

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"They were all good friends, Paul, close friends. Perhaps the best we would ever have. And one by one . . ." She stirred in his arms and turned her lips to be kissed.

Then he said, "What you're trying to tell me, Karen, is that your turn has come. I've known that for several days." He kissed her again.

"Of course." Her voice betrayed no surprise at his knowledge. "I'm being sent to London. One day soon now."

"Next Monday," he told her.

"Monday," she mused. "So we have but four days." She turned again to look up into his face. "Paul, I am going to tell you something."

"I already know it."

"But I am going to tell you anyway. I know all about you." She stared into his eyes. "*All* about you."

"If you value your safety, your life," he said slowly, "you won't repeat that statement to anyone. Not anyone! You especially won't mention it to anyone here in Washington."

"I'll keep silent," she promised. "Do you want to know how I found out about you?"

"I do know."

"Hush. I want to tell it my way." There was a pale smile on her lips, a mocking. "Someone slipped rather badly in trying to hide the secret of you. They kept you locked away, but they permitted you to have the books you wanted and they permitted visitors to your room. Do you remember the day you woke up and found me waiting there? After you had been shot? I had been waiting there a long time, thinking. Just thinking about you."

"Thank you," he said.

"I had been thinking about you ever since that first night I knew you. At first it was no more than a routine check to determine if you could hold your silence. But as time went on and I saw the very odd precautions taken over you, the almost insane concern for your safety, the manner in which you were shielded from the outside world as well as the world being kept away from you, I began thinking. When you were moved out here on the Pike and installed in kingly grace, my thoughts moved from mere thoughts to active speculation. I inspected your bookshelves quite early; it is a part of my way of becoming better acquainted with a man. And in that early inspection I noted two or three particular titles, titles and subject matters which aroused a mild curiosity in you. Am I saying *mild*?

"Later, when Dr. Roy and that other scientist came on the scene, I vividly recalled those books because Roy had been the author of

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one. It was too much to pass off as coincidence. All that, taken in consideration with your presence here and a rather unprecedented security cover led me to a conclusion. Oh, I thought it a wild and crazy conclusion! But as I waited in the room upstairs for you to recover consciousness, after the shooting, I read Roy's *Studies*. And so I like to believe I know all about you. I suppose my expression gave me away when you awoke." Karen whirled around to him, looking up. "Paul, can you do all that?"

"Not all of it, by any means," he said truthfully. "Roy was unable to clearly separate theory from fancy and a part of his work is pure nonsense—or so I believe. But he was four fifths correct. That much I can do."

"I don't think I would like that—to be in your place, I mean. I don't think I would care for it at all." Her hair moved against his lips as she shook her head. "And I'm not going to ask what it is like. I don't want to know."

What was it like?

It was like one grown man in a world of children, it was one set of vocal chords in a deaf-mute society, it was a broadcasting station in a civilization lacking radios, a knowledge of writing in a world where no one knew how to read. What was it like? It was like a grown man, himself, making love to a naive, teenage youngster. He had only to plant a suggestion and she would comply, only to insert a thought or a notion into her mind and she would act on it as if it were her own thought. She could not discern a difference.

"Someone," she repeated impishly, "would be awfully angry if they knew the mistake they made. They permitted the three of us in a room together : you, me, and a book."

"That someone would be more than angry," he warned again. "So you must be careful never to repeat this."

"I said I'd be careful, Paul. I will. I know why." She thought a moment. "For what reason am I being sent to London?"

"To separate us, as Peter and Carnell were separated. And Emily, too, if she hadn't moved away of her own free will. You're my last close friend here, so you have to go."

"I'm more than that," Karen reminded him softly. She put out a hand into the air, flipping her fingers, knocking down tenpins or houses of cards in her imagination. "Peter, gone ; Emily, gone ; Mr. Carnell, gone." A final, fourth flip. "Karen, going."

"Your'e only making things tougher for yourself, Karen. Let's enjoy what remains. We have four days."

"No," she contradicted. "We have forever."

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He had no wish to discourage her and kept silent. Peter Conklin had been thoroughly shocked to learn he would not see Paul again, and his had been a more stable mind with tighter discipline. There was no guessing Karen's probable reaction to such news.

XIV.

A spring rain had turned the gravel road to a slippery, sloshing roadway and the black Packard sedan travelled cautiously over it, the tyres sending up occasional sprays of dirty water when they hit a puddle. On either side of the road the Maryland countryside was blossoming with the new season and already the short grass was a live green, while the hardier trees had long since shot their buds. The Packard moved on to a steady, unslowing clip with Washington far behind.

After a while it navigated a wide curve in the road and a fence appeared ahead, a gate swung shut across the road. A sentry box stood to one side of the gate and beyond that were a few tents pegged out in a precise line. Men stood guard behind the gate, and two waited before it. The Packard drew up and stopped.

An M.P. strode up to either side of the car and peered in the windows.

"Your passes and identification, please?"

Paul handed his to the soldier nearest him. Beside him, the car's driver was offering his through the opposite window. Two men sitting in the rear seat held theirs ready, waiting their turn. The M.P. stared at his pass and the small photograph affixed to it as if he were memorizing it and then gave Paul a close, careful scrutiny. He passed on to the remaining identification, to swing back to Paul's face for a final look. After a moment he returned the cards.

"Thank you, sir." The M.P. moved to the men in the rear seat and the procedure was repeated. Afterward, one of the soldiers dropped to the ground to peer under the car while the other requested the keys to look into the trunk. Satisfied, he handed the keys back to the driver.

"Thank you, sir. You may proceed." He signalled, and the wide gate swung open. The Packard passed through.

Scarcely a mile along the twisting gravel road they arrived at a high stone wall and a second gate. More guards waited there, and the ritual was repeated all over again. When they were passed through, Paul turned to look back.

He said, "They must be hiding something in here. A rocket ship, maybe?"

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The driver grunted, but gave no other answer. He and the two silent men occupying the rear seat were strangers, operatives Paul had not seen before. They were military men, Paul knew, but were habitually dressed in civvies. Behind him in the old house on the Pike, he had left the bodyguards and the switchboard girls and the cook, left them all. The past was cut off, and no one from the past remained. Slater had deliberately turned a new page onto a new world and had ripped out and thrown away all the old pages of the familiar book. He briefly recalled Karen knocking down the imaginary figures with her fingers, one, two, three, four. Paul had one savage thought and then turned his mind from the girl. Slater was going to pay dearly for *one* and *four*.

The Packard rolled on through a thick wood and the road was improved, black topping replacing the crunching gravel. Abruptly they were out of the woods and into the open sunshine, with spacious green lawns spreading away in every direction. It was still a respectable distance to the house. Paul stared at it through the windshield, looking at every feature he had often seen in someone else's mind. It was as old and as beautiful as people had said, or thought, with gleaming white trim and tall columns setting it off amidst the lush green background. Paul peered around.

"Where's the rocket ship?"

The driver only glanced at him and pulled the car up before the entranceway. A butler came running out and opened the doors of the car. Paul climbed out, stretched, and stepped back. The two men who had ridden in the rear seat stood beside him ; doors slammed, and the car moved away.

"Good afternoon, sir," the butler greeted him. "May I show you to your apartment?"

"Yes. Where is it?"

"The third floor, sir. In that wing." The butler pointed to a row of windows.

"Did my trunks come?"

"Yes, sir. I have put everything away." He turned and led the way.

"Where's the rocket ship?" Paul wanted to know.

The man didn't hesitate in his stride. "We have no rocket ship, sir. Not to my knowledge."

They went through the great front door and into a reception hall, where still another man waited. He glanced up as they entered, nodded briefly to Paul, flicked a glance at the two others bringing up the rear and looked away. Paul was inwardly amused. Another sentry. And undoubtedly the back door contained still another.

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The butler continued on through the hall into a large and brilliantly lighted room, turned left, and finally stopped before a door.

"The elevator, sir." He opened the door. The four of them crowded in. Paul's last glimpse of the big room was of a magnificent chandelier hanging in the centre of an oval ceiling. The doors closed and the elevator lifted smoothly and silently. It stopped automatically at the third floor and they got out. The two men stayed beside the elevator, while the butler and Paul turned away and moved along a short, wide corridor. This particular end of the corridor contained but three widely separated doors. The butler stopped at the third and last one. He glanced up and saw Paul's questioning gaze on the other two doors.

"The nearest one is a linen closet ,sir," he said without being asked. "That first one is another apartment, connecting with yours. It is to be used by your visitors, sir, if you desire." He opened Paul's door and stood aside.

Paul found he had three rooms and a bath. Bookcases had been built into the walls of one, forming a library and study. All of his books had been installed on the shelves, leaving much room for future acquisitions. He looked for Roy's volume and found it in the same corner of the same shelf it had occupied in the old house. The second room was a living room, the one which opened onto the hallway, and the bedroom and bath made up the rest. All but the bedroom and the attending bath overlooked the front of the house and the winding drive which led to the distant gates. The bedroom, around on the side, overlooked a new swimming pool. He sat down.

"If you need anything, sir, ring. The bell push is there by the door. My name is Singer."

"Glad to meet you," Paul said. "I'm Breen."

"Thank you, sir." And he left.

Paul relaxed on the soft chair, looking about the room. From some ancient, forgotten picture he remembered a few words of a song a girl had sung, and hummed the words. "Good-bye, little yellow bird . . ." He stopped abruptly.

There had been an unexpected reaction to that, strangely like an echo.

He twisted in the chair and glanced around the room, puzzling over the thing. There had been an echo in his mind. But that didn't make sense—he didn't hear echoes, he heard only words spoken to him, or about him, or distant thoughts directed on him. Exploring the train of thought, Paul tried again. "Good-bye, little yellow bird, I must . . ."

The repetition came again, the queer sense of hearing his own words relayed through . . . through someone else. He got out of

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the chair and walked rapidly about the apartment, searching each room. He was alone. Next he cast about for the minds of those men he had only recently met. The driver of the Packard ; the man was in the garage back of the house, tinkering with the car. He was conversing with still another chauffeur, and neither of them was discussing Paul. The butler, then. But Singer had gone to his own quarters at the far end of the wing and was doing nothing more than loafing about, waiting for Paul to ring. He was thinking of Paul, but only in a distant, impersonal manner. That left the two bodyguards who had ridden silently in the rear seat and who had stayed beside the elevator. Paul sent a mental feeler toward the elevator. They were gone.

But he found them almost at once. They too were in another room of the opposite wing. One sat and read and smoked. The other sat and listened with a pair of earphones on his head. Paul stared at what he read in the man's mind and then swung about for a hasty search of his room. They were carefully hidden and he was a long time finding them. Microphones, two of them, cunningly buried in the molding which decorated the four sides of the room where walls and ceiling met. They were tiny, nearly invisible things. Quickly then he strode into the library and found another and finally found them in his bedroom and adjoining bath. Even in the bathroom!

" Well, I'll be damned!" he said aloud.

He heard his own surprised words repeated in the earphones fastened over the listener's ears, heard the words repeated again as they registered in the man's mind. His original sentence and the two quick repetitions were instantaneous, Paul mentally picking them out and separating them only by the vague tonal colourations of first the electrical reproduction and then the bodyguard's mental patterns. It was like listening to a record of your voice, played back in the same instant you spoke.

And the other apartment?

Following the thought, Paul went to the connecting door and stepped through, to search the rooms. There were but two and the bath. Each contained a tiny microphone. He waited there a moment before going back to his own rooms, frowning. There had been an odd something about the bedroom. Retracing his steps, he again crossed to the bedroom and poked about. And then he had it. Flinging open a closet door, he found an array of feminine clothing. a chest of drawers contained still more things, and a vanity table likewise revealed occupied drawers.

A " visitor " was already in residence.

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Paul sauntered back to his library and sat down in a deep, red plastic-covered chair. There was a matching footstool and he lifted the hinged top to discover a concealed liquor cabinet. Closing the lid after examining the labels on the bottles, he cried "Skoal!" to the microphones. In the distant room he heard the earphones repeat the toast. Paul propped his feet up on the footstool, clasped his hands about his knees and gazed at the sky beyond the window.

Some young woman had already moved into the adjoining apartment.

He had not the slightest doubt that she would be young and attractive and compliant with his wishes. She would be ever ready to dance with him, drink with him, make love with him. Slater would have thoughtfully arranged that, just as he had arranged to eavesdrop on every future minute of his life. Their lives. Both apartments, both bedrooms. Slater didn't particularly care if Paul was happy or not, but he saw to it that his comforts were taken care of. There had never been a complaint about food or drink, about the few articles of clothing requested, about the numerous books and other things Paul had purchased from time to time. A large paycheck was delivered every month—a check that Paul had signed and given to Conklin or Carnell to deposit in the bank. His bankbook now reflected a considerable balance. And since that initial meeting in the hotel five years ago, Karen had been more or less a constant companion, absenting herself as she chose or as the occasional demand of outside duty required. In truth, his comforts were well supplied. But a new world demanded a new population.

Paul wondered if this new woman in the adjoining apartment would be a plant, as Karen had been, or would she be an outsider imported for a single purpose? She could be either. Slater might be relying on the microphones to tell him all he wished to know, in which case the girl would be hired only to cater to him. Or Slater might be playing it doubly safe and ringing in another operative on him. Whatever the case, Slater knew he would instantly know which and apparently that didn't bother the department chief. The woman was there and Paul could suit himself. Slater—the good provider.

He sank lower in the chair and closed his eyes, letting his mind roam over the house. The entire structure formed a vague pattern on his consciousness and with a little effort he divided off the rooms into their proper perspective. Some of the rooms were peopled, but as he had not met those persons yet he was only aware they were there, no more. Room after room opened to his gaze and in half an hour he had the house committed to memory. It was a deceptively large place, capable of housing many more people than would

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be supposed from an exterior examination. He found the cable and radio rooms and found operators already there on duty ; discovered a switchboard set away at the back of the house and the vague image of a girl seated before it. A man lounged at the back door, and another sauntered about the yard. There was a very large dining room in one wing of the house, and another and smaller one in the opposite wing. Several people were lounging in the kitchen. The second floor seemed to be arranged in several units that suggested classrooms. Oh, yes—there the new agents would be trained.

They would come in from all over the country or the world to study the latest code, to participate in refresher courses, and Paul was to mingle with them, pretend to be one of them, meanwhile closely studying each individual and prying deeply into his or her mind. And in the end, Paul would be permanently attached to them in a certain mental sense, and they would be sent out again to various places in the world to look and to listen. Spynet supreme. No visible lines of communication, beyond the perfunctory filing of cables which every government watched as a matter of routine. And should an agent suddenly find himself in a position where he was unable to transmit physical messages, they would continue to be received anyway.

That was the work intended for Paul in the years to come.

He brought his attention back to the room in which he sat, and found himself contemplating the buried microphone. Idly, he wondered if he could damp it, destroy its sensitive parts so that it would not transmit—and then he rejected that idea. They would only replace it. It would be better to blanket the device temporarily, cause it to cease functioning for only as long as he wished. If he used reasonable caution they would suspect nothing, yet his privacy would be assured.

Paul put forth a slow and careful finger of probing mental perception, scanning the construction of the tin ear and its component parts. His mind reached a solder joint and with minor effort opened it. The microphone ceased transmitting. Quickly he swung back to those men in the far room who were listening, but there was no change in their attitudes ; they were unaware of the change. Getting up from the chair, he quietly closed the library door, shutting off sound to the other rooms, and then spoke aloud. With satisfaction, he noted that his words had not been heard in the earphones. With that, he laughed aloud. And Dr. Roy had called him a fake and a fraud because he had not used telekinesis to roll a pencil across a table.

Paul released his grip on the device and allowed the solder joint

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to close again. Whistling, he left the library and walked to the entrance door of the apartment. As he stepped out into the corridor one of the bodyguards appeared from the opposite wing.

"Hi," Paul greeted him. "I'd like to look over the house."

"Yes, sir." The man punched the elevator button.

At dusk, he took the elevator back to the third floor and his room. The house had been pretty much as he had visualized it earlier, but now he had the added advantage of having met most of the people currently occupying it. The bodyguard and he had taken a turn about the grounds, pausing beside the pool to wish for warmer weather. Paul flipped a farewell salute to the accompanying man and opened his apartment door.

He heard water running in the bathroom of the connecting apartment. *She* was in.

Almost before he could close his door, there came a light tap, and the butler stood there. "Pardon me, sir. Dinner will be at seven. Would you care to join the gentlemen downstairs, or would you prefer to dine here?"

"Here, tonight, I think," Paul told him after a moment's consideration.

"Yes, sir. For one or two ,sir?"

Paul glanced at him with some surprise and then turned to study the closed door of the other apartment. The sound of running water came through very clearly. "Make it two," he said.

"Yes, sir." Singer closed the door and departed.

Paul shaved and changed clothes. When he emerged from the bedroom the noise of the water had ceased, and now there were only tiny sounds indicating movement in the other apartment. He idled about the room, wondering what he would say to her. How did one invite a total stranger to dinner—and in the privacy of his rooms? The incongruity of that struck him at once and he laughed. But still, how should he go about it? He had never done it before and lacked a precedent. He couldn't just walk up and bang on her door and shout, "Soup's on—come and get it or we throw it to the hogs!"

Similarly, consider the superfluity of introducing himself as a means of starting the conversation. She would already know his name. Then why not play it the direct way? Rap on her door. Invite her to dinner. Here. At seven. She would reply yes or no. As easy as that.

Paul walked across the room. He rapped on her door. The small noises from the other side stopped.

"Yes?" Her voice was soft. He liked it.

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"I'm having dinner sent up for two. Join me?"

"Why, yes, thank you. I'll be there in just a moment." There seemed to be a smile in her voice.

There! See how simple it was? He waited. She moved about behind the door. He put his hands in his pockets and tried not to be nervous. She neared the door, paused with one hand on the knob. Paul saw the knob turn and jerked his hands from his pockets. The door opened and the girl stepped through, smiling prettily. Paul stared at her.

He exclaimed, "Jehoshaphat!" A borrowed word.

Martha Merrill said, "Hello, Paul. You evidently remember me."

"I saw you—saw you in that building downtown, about five years ago."

"Of course. I was breaking in on the switchboard. I heard you had asked about me." She advanced across the room and held out her hands to him. "I've come up in the world, as you can see."

She realized at once she shouldn't have said that, or at least phrased it quite that way. Paul was frowning at her and, despite himself, flicked a quick glance over her shoulder at the open doorway. Martha stopped, studying him, and before she could control it the shadow of an inward storm raced across her face.

"I don't like what you're thinking, Paul."

"I'm sorry. I apologize. You caught me by surprise."

She tarried a few seconds longer. "All right," she agreed then. "I'll forgive you." She put out her hand and Paul took it. "Fix me a drink?"

"Delighted. Come and see where the bar is hidden." He led her to the library and carefully closed the door behind them. Once inside, he put a finger to his lips to indicate silence and then stood a moment with his eyes closed. The solder joint in the microphone snapped open, destroying contact. Paul whirled around quickly and grasped the girl's arms.

"*You* screamed," he said with excitement.

Martha nodded. "Yes, Paul. I screamed."

"You—weren't there on the street?"

"No, I was quite some distance away. At home."

"But you were watching me?" His excitement grew.

Martha reached up and gently pried loose the tight grip he held on her arms. "I've been watching you and listening to you for five years, Paul. Since the day you arrived in Washington and walked past my switchboard."

"Martha," he whispered, "what are you?"

She smiled at him happily. "The same as you, Paul. Or very

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near the same." One hand raised and a finger pointed toward the ceiling. "I didn't know about those microphones. I can't break the connection as you just did."

"Are you reading me *now*? Have you been?"

"Of course, all the time. Forgive me again, Paul, but I was very amused at your hesitancy outside my door." She moved back from him. "And now, Paul, you had better replace the connection and make sounds of opening bottles. Someone will become suspicious."

"But I want to——"

"Not now," she cut him off. "We must keep up the pretence. Bottle noises, please."

Reluctantly his mind reached out and restored the solder joint. Hardly taking his eyes from her face, he reached into the footstool for the liquors. She gave the appropriate exclamation of surprise at discovering the cabinet and then told him how much to pour into her glass.

"No ice," he said then. "Do you mind?"

"Not at all. You have a beautiful place here." Martha clinked glasses with him and then surprised him a second time. "*It isn't necessary, to use spoken words, you oaf! Use your head.*" No sound had passed her lips as she deftly inserted the suggestion into his consciousness, via telepathy.

Paul stared open-mouthed, taken aback. "Why, I . . . *Why, I never thought of that! What's the matter with me?*"

"*You aren't used to it, as I am. You've had no opportunity to practice, you don't know what it means to converse in this manner.*"

"*Practice? And you have? How?*"

"*I have two brothers, Paul. Like myself. All telepaths. And now you make four.*"

"Well, I'll be damned!" he said aloud.

"Oh," she covered for him, "did you spill it? Try to be more careful." Martha winked and indicated the hidden ears.

"*Where are they?*" he demanded.

"*At home right now. In the islands.*" She took his hand and led him to the sofa. "*Don't ask so many questions, Paul. Look in and see. My mind is open to you.*" She pushed him down and then sat beside him, holding his arm. "*Look . . .*" she urged.

Paul closed his eyes without thinking, knowing that it was unnecessary, and peeped ever so cautiously into her conscious mind. She tightened her hold on his arm, urging him forward. Paul looked.

There were five of them in the family; Martha, her two brothers, her father and mother. The children were telepathic, the parents were not. Her father was that rare breed of man, a man who calmly

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and whole-heartedly accepted the strange gift possessed by his children and actively encouraged it. He aided them in their plans, did what he could to maintain the cloak of secrecy over them and acted as the fiercely proud father was supposed to act.

Their real home was in the West Indies, tucked away on a tiny island of the Grenadine archipelago, far off the trade and tourist routes and reachable only by native schooners working out of Grenada or St. Vincent's Island. Her parents were British subjects, her father a retired civil servant, and the whole of the West Indies were filled with retired civil servants of the Crown. He was but one among many, unnoticed, unobtrusive. Their home, back from a long white-sand beach, was visited only by the trade winds and a few native fishermen or boatmen from the neighbouring islands. Her brothers were there now. One had just come back from London; the other was preparing for a trip to South Africa.

Her supposed residence was in Savannah, Georgia. A carefully if fraudulently documented background existed there for any who cared to investigate. And of course she had been investigated before obtaining her present employment many years ago. The Savannah camouflage had withstood the test. Her purpose in Washington was the same purpose as those of her brothers in London, or Capetown, or wherever they chose to go : hunting for others like themselves, like Paul. To date, he had been the only find. Her particular choice of sentry duty, that of the Counter-Intelligence Corps, was a favourable one in that if other telepaths existed it was likely they would turn up there eventually, or be turned up by the agents of the C.I.C. As Paul had demonstrated.

It hardly seemed necessary to furnish reasons for wanting to locate other telepaths—her father referred to them as *Telemen*. He entertained dreams, as they sometimes permitted themselves to do, of an island, or a country, or the entire world populated by telemen. But meanwhile there were but four of them, and they should be together. There was one other reason. Martha was most emphatic on the point. She could not marry one of her brothers ; she had no desire to marry a man who did not share her faculty. And so she had hunted with doubled vigour. And Paul arrived.

But why hadn't she spoken out sooner? Why had she waited for five years?

Because her brothers had cautioned against any rash act. They were free agents, Paul was not. He was most securely wrapped in the arms of the C.I.C. and it was wisest for the time being to let him remain there. If and when the future brought about a natural means of releasing him from their jurisdiction, well and fine. If there were

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indications that freedom was never coming, steps would then be taken. Paul's initial mistake was to call attention to himself too early, to become embroiled in a government security agency. If that hadn't happened and he had remained a free man mutual discovery might have been a long time in coming, but eventually they would have found him, or he them. It would have been quite different. But as it was, she had followed her brothers' advice and kept silent, watching and waiting for the opportunity. That opportunity had come when she learned of plans to renovate the Maryland place for his residence, learned of Slaters' intentions to provide him with feminine company.

Because Slater was unaware of her, he was not on guard against her. Probably to his own mild surprise he changed his mind one day about the woman he was going to send to Maryland. He called Martha Merrill into his office, explained to her the desirability and necessity of placing a confidential agent in the adjoining apartment, outlined what her duties might consist of, and asked if her religion or morals forbade it. After a suitable delay, she accepted. They were both satisfied. Paul was here, she was here, they were at last together. The future would determine the next steps.

She hoped he didn't think her too bold?

"I should say not!" Paul exclaimed and then looked around guiltily. Martha laughed at him.

"*What of your brothers*?" he sent.

Dave, the elder, was a roving correspondent for the *Times* of London. One couldn't wish for more adequate protective colouration, couldn't hope for a better excuse to roam the world. Marty, the younger, conducted guided tours to all parts of the globe for the American Express Agency. Herding tourists was an onerous chore, but it served the purpose. She had chosen this particular agency in the United States because of what it and the nation was. If Brazil had been the world's leading power, she would be working in the Brazilian foreign office, if that were at all possible. Her parents remained on the island, keeping the sanctuary against the day it might be needed.

Did he remember the early day when he had asked after her, asked about the possibilities of a date and Conklin had said she flew home on emergency leave?

Yes.

She had gone to the island by a circuitous route to inform her parents of her discovery. Had she not left so quickly she would have probably met him that night or the next. She later regretted missing him, but it was not to be helped. The shock and the thrill of the discovery as he walked past the switchboard had upset her,

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had sent her packing with the news.

Paul rubbed his eyes and opened his mouth to say something, when a tap sounded at the door.

Singer had brought their dinner.

XV.

1950-1952

He constantly watched the girl across the dinner table.

"You're pretty," he had informed her bluntly. "I thought so five years ago and I think so now."

"Thank you, Paul. Now eat your dinner."

He permitted his thoughts to roam over her, around her and at her aimlessly and undisciplined, while he ate. (I like your hair; I've always liked long hair, I think. I like the way it curls inward against your neck and shoulders. There's a name for that, isn't there?) She nodded, went on eating and listening to his random mentation. (Brown eyes, too. Snappy. Brown eyes and brown hair make a perfect combination—well, I think so. I would judge you at about five foot three or four. Aren't you? Pretty package, gal. Your skin is rather pale; maybe you need more sun. Not that I'm the complaining kind, you understand. I think you have magnificent . . .) He stopped, swallowed, and the colour ran high in his cheeks.

"All right," she laughed at him lightly, "I forgive you this one time."

(You scan me too easily. Not fair! I can't do that to you.) Paul stopped eating to stare hard. "*Say! Why wasn't I aware of you waiting on the other side of the door?*" He almost hurled the puzzled thought across the table at her. "*You said you saw me standing there, fumbling.*"

She made a face at him: "*Because I have something you do not, Paul, just as you have certain talents I don't possess. I said there were small differences between us.*"

"*What:*" he demanded.

"*I have no ability whatever with telekinesis; I can't disconnect the microphones as you did. And I lack the parabolic receptivity that you seem to possess. I didn't discover the microphones and the men listening.*" And then she thought to add, "*I'm unable to scan the separate rooms in the house, but I can follow your percipience as you do.*"

"*But what do you have that I don't?*"

"*A mental barrier. a kind of shield to prevent your looking in on me.*"

"*You can do that?*" he asked with astonisment.

Martha nodded. "*Try me—now.*"

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Paul tried. Peer and pry as he did, searching over the surface of her mind for a crack or crevice however small that a thought might slip through, he found nothing.

Her cerebration was opaque. She was wrapped in complete silence. Little wonder that he had been unable to locate a woman who had screamed in the night!

He said aloud in wonder, "How do you do that?"

"I'll be happy to teach you, in return for what you can teach me." She put out a hand. "A bargain?"

He reached for the waiting hand. "A bargain!"

The gentleman patiently listening at the earphones must have wondered what was going on, catching as he did only the spoken parts of the conversation.

The initial group of intelligence agents arrived, and Paul began the training work assigned to him. The big house which had held comparatively few people when he first moved in now seemed full to overflowing, but he quickly discovered that not all the arriving strangers were field men sent in for training. There was a sprinkling of internal security agents, watching the students; and of course there were additional staff members to feed and house the influx. The wheels within wheels were everywhere; Paul found a cook and a chauffeur who were intelligence men, and an upstairs maid who not only checked on Martha but the other domestics in the household. One of the girls in the stenographer's pool kept a wary eye on the female clerical help and on the switchboard women. And with each of them it was the same baffling paradox: they were to watch for they knew not what, but they were to watch for it.

It reminded him of an anecdote that made the rounds after the war. The censors attached to Los Alamos and the other units of the Manhattan District kept strict watch on the scientists under them, watching for a leak by word or letter. They didn't know what kind of leak to watch for, and had not the slightest idea what was in the making, but like patient dogs they kept watch. And finally caught a man. In a note to a friend, the man had described a method of prolonging the life of a flashlight battery.

In time, Paul found himself securely attached to and constantly aware of a group of a half dozen men; he came to know them internally and externally as well as he had known Palmer of the F.B.I., as well as Carnell. He could follow them with ease day or night, awake or sleeping, and when they were sent to Washington and on to Miami for unwitting distance tests he was there beside them mentally. All unknowing, they passed the tests and were ready.

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Paul notified the man in charge of the Maryland centre, a Lieutenant General Boggs, and the six agents were dispatched. Training immediately began with a new group.

Lieutenant General Boggs became the twelfth man to be made aware of Paul's secret—at least as far as Slater was concerned. Slater knew nothing of Karen's knowledge, of Martha Merrill and her family of four. Paul privately admitted that the affair was beginning to take on the aspect of a circus. But Boggs found himself the official twelfth and he didn't like it ; he regarded Paul with nothing but suspicion and distrust. Although he maintained the duty desired of him, he kept a barrier between himself and that freak, Paul Breen.

With the dispatch of those first agents overseas, the training programme began to pay small dividends. Sooner than information would have trickled back through normal channels, Paul learned a few of the things going on in East Germany—and Washington promptly lodged a protest demanding the dissolution of the East German police militia created by Russia, claiming it to be really the nucleus of a German Army. The White House and the State Department were informed well in advance of the outcome of certain elections and the return from exile of King Leopold III of Belgium. In late July came the news of Russia's intention of returning their representative to the U.N. Security Council, and so of course his actual return caused no surprise.

More men were trained and then sent away. Not all were assigned to overseas posts. Slater had ideas.

A former government official suddenly admitted he had been a Communist and named three others like himself. The mayor of a large city resigned almost unexpectedly and was given a foreign post. A new friendliness developed toward Spain and several concessions were made to that nation. In October, the President flew to Wake Island to confer with General MacArthur on Far East Policy —and a Breen-Slater agent went along as a member of the plane crew.

"*How goes it?*" Martha asked.
"*Like eating pie. Do you see what he's up to?*"
"*Slater? Yes. He's spinning a web all his own.*"
"*Is your brother in London? Dave?*"
"*Not at the moment. but he will be soon.*"
"*Ask him to go to Ireland, when he can. Look up a man named Willis, Walter Willis. I'm convinced he is someone we should know.*"
"*Willis? I know that name.*"
"*You do! How?*"

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"*It has come up at the office. That is, in the mind, not in conversation. Willis is one of Slater's agents. He receives information from him and sends to him.*"

"*Sends to him? You're sure?*"

"*Yes, Paul.*"

"*Is that all you know of Willis?*"

"*That's all. He's one name in a hundred or more that I've chanced across a time or two. Why, Paul? Is he connected with this web of Slater's?*"

"*I think so. I've been watching for something ever since I caught Slater attempting to hide the name from me.*" He reflected a moment. "*I suppose that's why you haven't learned the answer before this. Slater didn't suspect you and so hid nothing from you. Having nothing to hide from you, he had no betraying thoughts of Willis around you. So you accepted the casual references as just another agent.*"

"*I'm sorry, Paul. I should have peered more closely.*"

"*No fault of yours. There was nothing there to arouse your suspicions as there was in my case. Perhaps your brother can find something in Ireland. And caution him—Willis is dangerous.*"

"*I'll tell him. Be good, Paul. And come home as soon as you can. I haven't seen you all day.*"

He flashed a grin. "*If the elevator isn't running I'll climb the stairs. What's for dinner?*"

"*What would you like?*"

"*I'll start with a kiss. Be at the door.*"

"Now, Mr. Breen," the instructor said, "suppose you key a word and the class will build a cipher."

The number of men who reported to the training centre surprised Paul. It was quite apparent that Slater had quickly enlarged upon his original idea, once the initial successes became known. The trainees continued to come in, in small but continual streams until by the year's end, Paul had lost count of their actual number. He estimated it at near fifty. He suspected that Slater was actively recruiting new men all the time, sending them directly to the old mansion or using them as domestic replacements for the more experienced agents already in service. They would appear in batches of six, but as soon as each half dozen were sent to some distant city for a final telepathic test, they were shipped overseas and new trainees took their places. He managed to keep in contact with them all, but now it was no longer a constant, uninterrupted contact as it had been with Peter Conklin; instead he found himself handling so many men by the year's end that he was forced into an intermittent

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union with each—grazing first one and then the other, pausing for a close inspection only at those times when the agent seemed to have something important under observation.

Paul called a temporary halt to the proceedings by faking a relapse, a second period of illness in which nothing was heard or reported. The doctor was rushed in to examine the old scar on the back of his neck, but nothing could be learned from that. Paul complained to General Boggs that the work was too much and too heavy, he had been losing contact with some of the men for days before the illness struck. The intermission of silence, lasting for over a week, frightened Boggs and, by association, Slater. For more than a week they lived in daily fear of their beautifully constructed espionage net crumbling beneath their fingers. Slater, nearly frantic, consulted Dr. Roy to learn no more from him than had been learned from the doctor who continued to stop in twice daily to inspect the pulse and the old scar. With spiteful vengeance, Roy pointed out that he knew less of Paul Breen than any of them, thanks to the policy of keeping them apart. So why ask him for advice now?

Paul and Martha enjoyed the furore.

On New Year's Eve, an agent died in Vladivostok. The man had been one of a group trained at the centre the previous summer and Paul's perception of him had not been continuous, but his death seemed to signal a mass movement. On New Year's Day, the Chinese Communists opened a terrific drive in Korea and barrelled down the peninsula. Almost at the same time Canada started work on still another atomic pile. Paul reported both developments before the newspapers or governmental reports. A conference of British Commonwealth Prime Ministers opened in London, and for some reason Slater evinced an interest in that. He left Washington in late January to witness the latest bomb tests in Nevada, but behind him the various events were watched and recorded.

General MacArthur decided, in the opening days of February, that the Chinese entry into the new war upset all the preconceived ideas of quick victory ; in Maryland, General Boggs notified interested parties of the decision and smugly predicted that a public announcement would be forthcoming soon. He was proven right two weeks later. And another French cabinet fell, almost on schedule.

An agent in Iran discovered and reported rumours of a plot to assassinate a premier who opposed the nationalization of oil ; a secret warning was flashed to the official from Washington, but it did not prevent the assassination. General Eisenhower assumed the effective command of all Atlantic Treaty forces in Europe, and one of Slater's men stalked about his headquarters with eyes and ears opened wide.

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Only a few miles away, the President decided to relieve MacArthur of his Far East command, and Slater told his few close friends of the development several days before the public announcement was made.

"*Paul?*"

"*Yes?*"

"*Dave is in Ireland again. He is inclined to agree with you about that man. Some sort of undercover agent.*"

"*Yes, Conklin found out that much. A few have heard of him, but nobody wants to talk about him.*"

"*You think he is in with Slater?*"

"*That seems to be the connection; Slater exhibited a definite guilt when hiding his name from me. And have you noticed something? None of these men shipped out of here have been assigned to Ireland. Every place in the world but Ireland.*"

Summer came again, and Martha and Paul spent as much time out of doors as possible; they dawdled for an hour or two each day in the swimming pool—alone. By some curious and unwritten law, no other member of the household cared to use the pool while they were in it, although there was always a maid lurking somewhere near by who would rush out with towels as they climbed from the water. Or they went for long, slow walks around the farthest reaches of the walled-in estate, again alone, but only after Paul had bluntly invited a bodyguard *not* to accompany them.

"I seem to detect a measure of distrust," Martha said after they were out of earshot. She laughed.

"And doubt," Paul added. "He's wondering if he should tag along anyway. Our slightest wish is their command, except where our wishes conflict with their wishes."

"This is like a prison, even to the wall. I wonder what is on the other side of the wall?"

"I don't want to point, but a pair of sentries are standing over there in the woods about opposite us. They heard you laughing a moment ago—and exchanged sneers."

"I can't . . ." She hesitated, groping for the men, and then found them. "Oh, yes, I see them now. Please notice my improvement, teacher. And do you know what I did last night? I disconnected the microphone in my bathroom."

"Be careful," Paul was quick to warn her. "Don't ever let them suspect you are what you are. That would be fatal."

"But, Paul, my bathroom! And I will be careful." She reflected for a moment. "Those sentries—I can't read them very well. You said they were sneering?"

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"Their grapevine has been working overtime, mostly in the wrong direction. A good-sized body of men are encamped out there and you'd be surprised at some of their notions; they don't actually know who or what is inside the wall, but they've seen men and women coming in. Rumour has made an evil woman of you, Martha."

She laughed again, but without sound. "Then they aren't sneering, Paul. They are envious."

He nodded. "That too." As they walked on he found a man perched in a distant tree. "See him?" he asked.

She stared hard, looking for the particular tree etched in his mind. "No. Where?"

"I'll make him move. Watch for a movement."

The concealed marksman fumbled, nearly dropped his rifle and shot out a quick hand to recapture it.

"Yes! I saw that. And there are more of them."

"Yes; all around us. They can see you and the other women and start the rumours. Word of mouth does the rest." Paul grinned suddenly. "Our boy is looking at your legs right now. But for that matter, so are half dozen others back at the house." She was wearing shorts.

"Everyone does," she protested, "except you. I never see you looking at them."

He responded with a laugh and then carefully selected one image from a storehouse of recent memories. He held the image at the front of his mind until she blushed.

"Stop it, Paul! That isn't fair."

"But I've made my point."

They walked on, moving down the hill as the land fell away from the woods and dipped toward the distant buildings. The sun was hot overhead and after a while Paul removed his shirt.

"Were you listening to that navy report the other day?" he asked her. "The one that said a Douglas Skyrocket had flown higher and faster than any other plane?"

"I seem to remember something about it. Why?"

"The navy's holding back. That particular flight was made several weeks ago; there've been one or two more since then. Do you know what they're preparing to do?"

"No." Martha looked up at him. "But I can guess you are wishing *you* were doing it."

"They're planning a round-the-world flight in that ship. With a minimum number of stops. Right now they're setting up refuelling bases and they hope to send that ship completely around the world pretty soon—the ultimate goal is nonstop around the world, either

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jet or rocket. Maybe a combination of the two. I think they'll make it."

She nodded, following his reasoning. "Fast."

"Very fast. A matter of hours." He thought to add, "And watch that new business at White Sands. I can't get too much information there, but I suspect they're building a moon rocket and expect to fill it with test animals. The army is far ahead of the navy in rocket programmes."

"A lot of people will be terribly surprised if it *is* green cheese," she suggested.

Paul agreed. "But think what might happen if that first rocket carries rats and mice. What will lovers and songwriters do then?" In a suddenly serious mood he added, "You're right though about my wishing for that round-the-world flight. I want to be almost anyplace but here." He reached out to seize her hand possessively. "What's your island like—your home?"

"Absolutely beautiful! My mind is open. Look."

A blue, a very blue lagoon lifted bodily from a Technicoloured picture book and set down in an already blue Caribbean Sea forty miles from anywhere; beyond that a silvery beach of sand so white and fine it hurt the eyes to gaze at it under the noonday sun, and still beyond *that* was the nearest approach to paradise on earth a retired servant of the Crown might ever hope to see. A small island among other similar dots in the region—no more than a few square miles and therefore worthless from a commercial or tourist standpoint; the island was far to the south of the hurricane belt, but squarely in the path of the trade winds, and its climate was perpetual summer. Their home stood back from the beach in a storied setting of palms; there was a large garden, some cattle and sheep. The island did not have a single paved road, no building more than a storey high, no gas mains, no running water other than a well with a pump, and no electricity except that generated by each family for their own use. The only other inhabitants of the island were descendants of slaves, Africans who were fishermen, sailors or boatbuilders.

St. George's, Grenada, was forty miles away by native schooner; the city had everything you might expect of any small city except that the goods tended to be British or domestic products rather than American. They went to the city perhaps once or twice a month for supplies, but other than that the family lived gratefully alone in a semi-wild Eden of their own choosing. "*Does all this sound too primitive?*"

"*So primitive,*" he responded instantly, "*that I'd trade everything I have for it!*" He glanced at her and a qualifying thought occurred to him. "*Well, almost everything.*"

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Late July, and one of Slater's roving agents caught up with and hastily reported back on a high official of the British Foreign Office, who had been missing from his home since May. This man, along with one other, had vanished quite unexpectedly and mysteriously for no apparent reason and had succeeded in remaining under cover for months. General Boggs and his superior received the news, considered it, and then did nothing. Boggs because he wasn't expected to, Slater because he did not care to. Within a few days the Briton again slipped from view.

Meanwhile there had been still another assassination, another cabinet fall, a banking crisis, and a king who had only recently returned from exile packed his bags to give up his throne a second time. His son succeeded him. His son had a very warm friendship with that personable young American from the embassy.

During the closing week of September, Russia tested a second atomic bomb. Encouraged by the authenticity of the first report, the White House reported it on the third day of October and almost immediately the far-flung monitoring stations looked to their screens for evidence. It came. Still another test, the third, followed shortly

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thereafter, but it was a strangely familiar activity in an entirely unexpected place which caught and held Slater's astonished attention that autumn. Great Britain began showing the first outward, unmistakable signs of possessing such a bomb—or at least the manufacture of one. The signs were not easily read by the unpracticed eye, but Slater detected them. He assigned three special agents to widely separated British points, waiting and watching.

Paul also watched those three. He was unable to watch Slater directly, but by now he could calculate Slater's intentions by studying his reactions to any given stimulus. Upon the receipt of confidential news, via Paul and Boggs, Slater would either act or not act according to some deeper purpose of his own ; by watching what he did with the information received and the subsequent shifting of men to distant places, it was often possible to guess those intentions. Sometimes nothing more was ever heard of the matter ; at other times a later news dispatch or radio broadcast would touch upon a foreign event which could only be an outgrowth of Paul's receptivity and Slater's meddling.

American efforts to mediate the oil dispute between Iran and Great Britain ended in complete failure ; Paul was suspicious of that failure because Slater had followed the entire matter with close interest. And what possible concern could he have with a military coup in Damascus which ended with the overthrow and arrest of a premier and his ministers?

Christmas brought a halt to nearly all the activity. Paul held seventy men, and he bluntly warned General Boggs there could be no more. He underlined his warning by sketchy reports and frequent headaches ; many days would go by while he reported nothing at all on some agents although the cabled reports from those observers continued to be received at the centre. Again, in the midst of a briefing or reporting session, he would suddenly stop talking and complain of a headache. Boggs was fearful of a recurrence of the previous year's illness and slacked off. Christmas leaves were granted to most of the centre's personnel and to Martha after she requested it. But because of her closeness to Paul, she was warned again of security rules before departing, and a man was assigned to shadow her after she passed through the gates.

"*Watch your step*," Paul cautioned her. "*Whatever you do will be talked about.*" He stood at a third-floor window, watching her car moving along the black-top drive.

Martha had settled back in the seat and was chatting with a young officer en route home for the holidays. The officer was surprised and delighted to find her alone.

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She smiled at the officer and flashed to Paul, "*I will, darling. I want to spend a few days in Savannah for appearance's sake. Be back soon —see you Christmas Day. And look what this goon is working up to* !"

The officer made his opening bid, a brief attempt to convince her she should go home with him. "The folks will love you !"

"*Beware the wages of sin*," Paul declared after her. "*Somebody besides the folks will be loving you. Make him squirm—give him ants in the pants.*"

"*Oh, Paul, no* !"

"*I'm the jealous type*," Paul said. "*If he drops that hand on your knee, he gets the works.*"

As the car neared Washington the young officer gave a startled yelp of pain and surprise. He clutched his posterior and reddened. The chauffeur turned around.

"What's the matter?"

"A bee bit me !"

"Bees? In December? You're crazy."

Paul remained at the third-floor window, whistling.

Christmas Day was quiet and cold with a stillness to the air that seemed to promise eternal peace. The trees beyond the far wall

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were blackly naked, holding their limbs against an overcast sky, and the soldiers beneath them shivered and cursed. Not until noon did a weak sun appear, but it did nothing to dispel the cold.

Paul had a late breakfast and wandered through the great house, marvelling at its emptiness. It had not been so vacant since the spring day he had moved in, nearly two years before. He prowled around, exchanging "Good mornings" and "Merry Christmases" with those who had to stay behind, and finally located the one man he was searching for. He knew the man was one of Slater's inner agents, set to watch Paul and the others inhabiting the house, and so he had deliberately selected him for the errand to make it easier for the information to reach the chief.

"Did you get it?" Paul asked the officer.

"Right here." He held out the small package. "And good luck to you"

"Thanks, thanks for both."

The delivery of the package implied that Slater had given his approval. It could have been stopped easily enough. Paul opened the package to display the engagement ring. "Think she'll like it?"

"I would, in her shoes," the officer declared. And then he laughed. "We paid plenty for it!"

Martha returned in the early afternoon. Paul had been watching for her for hours and located the automobile while it was still distant from the Maryland place. She was greatly excited.

"*Paul. My brother was in Savannah!*"

"*You didn't contact him——*"

"*No, of course not. He put up at the hotel and I had lunch in the dining room. Paul, he located Willis.*"

"*Tell me!*"

"*Look in, Paul. You will get it faster that way. I've memorized it all.*" She put aside her barrier shield and her thoughts lay naked to him.

The silence between them was long and contemplative. The automobile left the highway and turned in at the road leading to the gates protecting the estate. It had reached the second gate before Paul spoke again.

"*So that's Willis!*"

"*Nasty, isn't it? And Slater preaching patriotism!*" She was bitter and bewildered. "*Paul, what are we going to do?*"

"*I don't know. Yet. Nothing at all until we can find a way to bring him down.*"

The car moved through the second gate and entered the drive leading to the house. After a minute Martha had a new thought, tinged with growing curiosity.

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"*Paul, what are you hiding?*"

"*Hiding: Me?*"

"*Don't pretend to innocence! I can sense an evasion about something. What has happened?*"

"*Nothing's happened, the way you mean.*"

"*Then what are you hiding from me?*"

She felt his warm laughter. "*Come home and find out!*"

He held the ring box in his hand, carefully concealing it from her prying mind.

XVI.

1953

"They'll never catch me, Paul. I promise you that."

He moved forward in the chair and pushed the girl to the edge of his lap. "I'm hungry. Please see what's holding up dinner."

She struggled to retain her seat on his lap, tried to kiss him once more, but he stood up, laughing. "Move! I'm starving."

Martha gained her footing, winked a secret thought to him and crossed over to the apartment door. Her outstretched hand hesitated on the knob and she looked over her shoulder for a quick, fond glance. "I'm glad you love me, Paul."

And opened the door.

She remained there for long frozen seconds with the door half open, staring into the corridor outside, staring at someone beyond his line of vision. Her hand flew to her mouth to shut off a scream and when she turned to him her face was flushed and frightened.

"*Be careful!*" he shot at her. "*Know nothing!*"

"Paul . . ."

"Yes?"

"It has been very lovely knowing you, darling," she whispered. "Good-bye."

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And she was gone from the doorway, roughly shoved aside by a tall, ponderous man who seemed every inch the suave man of distinction. The newcomer was not in uniform, but he could not discard his military bearing. He stepped quickly into the room and shut the door behind him with a forceful positive action.

Paul did not move from his chair. "Colonel Johns?"

"Since you know my name already—yes."

"Please come in."

"I am in." Briskly.

"Thank you. I've sent down for dinner. Will you join us?"

"No. And it will not come."

"Oh?" Paul relaxed in the chair with one hand resting lightly on a volume of Robinson. "Now . . . ?"

"Now," the colonel echoed bluntly. He remained at the door, braced against it. "And I shall dispense with the formalities." He pulled a service automatic from under his coat. "There will be none of this nonsense with last meals and last words. If you know my name, you also must know I have the same regard for you as I do for a snake. I hate snakes." He raised the gun to eye level, taking careful sight on Paul.

Paul Breen still did not move from the chair. "There is nothing I can say?" he asked quietly.

"Nothing. It is decided." The finger tightened on the trigger.

"Then I am sorry for you. Good-bye, Colonel Johns."

The barrel of the gun flipped around in a quick and complete arc and exploded into flame. The walls were soundproofed, and not even the deadened microphones carried the sound of the booming shot.

The colonel's stiff, military body collapsed on the floor, its face and most of its head blown away. The gun clattered noisily from useless fingers, came to rest on the hardwood floor. The weapon had betrayed its owner in a most hideous manner. and the surprise in the man's mind would now remain there for eternity. Paul left his chair and stood looking down at the body for no more than an instant, turned and walked softly toward the connecting door to Martha's apartment. He touched the knob and quickly yanked the door open. A man's startled face peered out at him.

"Come in, Slater. Join the party."

Slater hesitated in the doorway, incredulously staring from Paul's living body to the dead one across the room.

"He's dead," Paul assured him. "Close range."

"What happened to him?" Slater demanded.

"He shot himself."

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"You're lying!" Slater advanced a few steps into the room, an expression growing on his face.

"Look for yourself."

Slater did. He crossed the room and slipped down to one knee, studying the fallen body. Carefully avoiding the widening pool of blood, he peered this way and that, making up his mind slowly and desperately.

"How did you do this?"

Paul smiled down at him, a cold, mocking gesture. "You should know. You questioned Roy and Grennell about telekinesis. You sent Carnell to question me. Take a long hard look, Slater." He motioned to the body. "Telekinesis."

"You made him shoot himself?"

"I caused the gun to turn. You're next."

"*What*!" Slater jumped hastily to his feet, backing away. "You can't make me kill myself. You can't."

Paul said nothing. There was a brief movement glimpsed in the corner of the eye and Slater jerked his head around, glaring at the movement. The colonel's fallen automatic was moving slowly across the floor, sliding its slow way toward Slater's feet. He watched it in stunned disbelief, the sweat suddenly appearing on his face and neck. The gun inched up to the tips of his shoes, touched one and stopped Slater leaped backward.

Paul told him harshly, "Telekinesis."

"I'll see you in hell first!" Slater made a sudden grab for his shoulder holster and when his hand re-appeared it contained a twin to the automatic on the floor. He raised for aim, hesitated, and his face assumed a new pallor. Veins stood out on his neck and there was a wildness in his eyes. As he watched in mounting horror his

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hand turned on him, the barrel of the automatic swinging around to align with his eyes. It stopped, held steady.

He found himself staring into the deadly barrel, unable to move his hand, his body, his head. Only his lips would move and now they were begging in a hoarse whisper. "Take it away! *Take it away*!"

"Not yet—not until you hear what I have to say."

"I'll listen to anything. Take it away!"

"No." Paul sank back in the chair, watching the man with a fixed, cold stare. "I don't care for dramatics, Slater, and I don't care for intrigue—especially your kind. I'm going to say what I have to say as quickly as I can, and then we'll end this."

"I'll listen," the chief pleaded desperately.

"You damned well can't help yourself! I made one mistake years ago, Slater, and since then you've made all the rest of them. I allowed myself to be discovered for what I am, a freak in your world. Since that day I've been told many times that I shouldn't have let it happen; if I had been older, wiser, it wouldn't have happened. But it did, and I came to Washington, frankly eager to help you in any way I could. You knew that, and you were quick to take advantage of me. And you began making some mistakes that I'll never forgive.

"You planted the sniper outside the embassy that night—you wanted me killed, but you had to get me away from the house to do it. Because you found out I was tracing a man named Willis, and because I would not knuckle down under your orders. I had refused to cooperate with Carnell. So you planted the sniper and hoped to eliminate me. You failed." Paul leaned forward, tense. "You also planted Karen on me earlier, that night of the party in the hotel room. And afterward, years afterward when we had become close friends, you forced her to make a written report on our personal activities. You know what that did to her. That's two I owe you, Slater.

"And then you robbed me of the few friends I did have. You were jealous or afraid of our friendship. You sent Peter Conklin to Russia—and then saw to it that a patrol found him, when he proved a better spy than you had expected. You hadn't intended for him to get so close to their bombs, had you? You never liked the firm bond between us, did you? So Conklin was hunted down and shot, indirectly by your hand. Willis took care of that matter. Next, you ordered Carnell to Tokyo by plane, and an unexpected engine failure threw that plane into the Pacific. You were not willing to share the knowledge of me with a man of Carnell's calibre. Two more gone, and that's four I owe you.

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"Conklin's friend, Emily, had already disappeared, leaving only Karen. You packed Karen off to England, and she is still over there, slowly driving herself insane wondering when she can come back. Two more marks on the score. I owe you a lot, Slater, and the time has come to pay off."

Slater whispered, "Take this away!"

"It stays there until I'm ready. I'm not finished. The next matter is this training centre, and the agents you've carefully spread over the world. A master spy-net, efficiently directed and beautifully operated, the kind of spy-net the world has never known before. A wonderful and patriotic idea, Slater, if only *this* country could have had full advantage of it. Unfortunately, they did not. Because you've consistently short-stopped information for your own purposes; that which you thought safe to pass along to Washington, Washington used, but that which you did not consider fit for them was given only to Willis. And Willis used it. Seventy good, intelligent men covering the world, seventy men reporting back to you and Willis the things that are hard to know.

"And so we come to your last mistake. Is the gun getting heavy? It won't take so long now. You realized, finally, that I knew about Willis, knew your connection to him. Investigations came to light that could only have originated with me. Belatedly, you traced Conklin's movements between planes at Shannon and found that he had done some prying; you've also watched Karen's activities to see if she is spying for me. And now Willis has told you definitely that someone is after him, has been investigating him for several months. He found clear evidence of it. So the two of you decided

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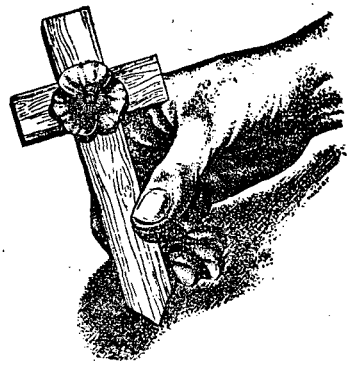

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it was far past time to kill me. And you sent Colonel Johns in here." Paul stared at him with disgust. "Johns wasn't supposed to live after shooting me. You had to silence his tongue, so you were waiting there in Martha's room for him to finish the job."

Paul arose from the chair and went to a closet to get his jacket. He checked the inner pocket to see if his wallet and credentials were there and came back to Slater.

"You're sweating, Slater. I like that. Conklin didn't have time to sweat—his happened too quickly. But Carnell did, as his plane went down. He had to sit there and watch himself fall. And Karen is now, sweating out a return ticket. Sweat just a little more, Slater, and we'll go." He stood before the man, cold and angry.

"There's just one more thing to tell you, to make the rest of your short life miserable. You're not alone in this—you aren't the only one looking down the barrel of a gun tonight. Willis is sweating, too."

The man's eyes moved dully away from the automatic, glaring up at Paul. "Another . . . freak?" he whispered.

Paul nodded, liking the appellation. "Another freak. Like myself. And Slater—that isn't all. There are *more*. I'm glad that hurts you, Slater."

"Freak," he tried to shout and failed.

"Sure," Paul agreed without humour. "And Willis is meeting his—now. Another freak has been on his tail for months, another freak aroused his suspicions and turned you on me. That freak is doing to Willis what I'm doing to you now. Willis was your master, Slater, and you wanted to ape him. Willis has been in business for a long, long time and a lot of men had wanted to ape him. Willis worked for Germany in 1914, and offered his services to the world after that war. He worked for that country again in 1939, and turned to Russia when the second German attempt collapsed. But on the side he has sold his goods and services to the highest bidder, to all the highest bidders, at all times. Willis stayed in Ireland and spied on all the world, for all the world. People like you were his puppets. He owned you body and soul.

"Willis was the master of them all, and men like you danced as he pulled the strings." Paul put on his jacket. "Willis comes to a full stop tonight. As you will. Put the gun away."

Slowly, stiffly, struggling against his will, the hand returned the automatic to its holster and then smoothed down the coat over it.

"Now listen very carefully and don't make a mistake. If you *do* make a mistake, or attempt to signal, or cry out, your tongue will stick in your throat and strangle you. We will walk downstairs.

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You will order a car to the door. You will tell the chauffeur to stay behind. You will drive. We will go through the gates and show our passes as we've always done. We will drive to the Washington airport. When we get there, you will buy tickets for that old escape route, remember? Washington to Miami to New Orleans to Mexico City. And then we will board the plane."

The hoarse whisper, "What happens . . . ?"

"Why," Paul told him in mock surprise, "you'll never reach Mexico City, of course. Something will happen to *you* along the way."

"I won't!" Slater defied him, his voice a mixture of fear and rage. "**I won't go!**"

"You will," Paul contradicted. "Like this."

The room held a moment of silent tension and suddenly Slater screamed, clutching his stomach in agony.

"You will," Paul repeated with false pleasantness. He flashed a searching thought for Martha, somewhere about the grounds. "*Did you hear this?*"

"*I heard you, Paul.*" He could sense her trembling.

"*Where are you? Are you clear?*"

"*Clear and safe. I'm taking a stroll about the yard. One man with me.*"

"*Get rid of him. Walk slowly toward the drive or the gate. If we have any luck we can pick you up in the car.*"

"*Bring my gate pass. Bureau drawer, top.*"

"*Will do. Watch us. Try.*"

He turned to Slater. "More? Or can you walk now?" They moved slowly toward the elevator through Martha's room.

A clouded moon rode high over the Gulf of Mexico, allowing only intermittent shafts of pale light to strike the warm lazy waters of the Gulf below. The night was quiet, almost deserted, although a few miles away the glare of neon lights reflected against the cloudy sky, and now and again came the wild throbbing sound of a jukebox turned up too high. On some distant highway an occasional automobile darted along on singing tyres, making for the lights of the town. It was a nameless Florida town, small and nondescript and resting somewhere above St. Petersburg on the gentle crescent of the Gulf shore.

Martha hugged the beach cautiously, watching the far lights of the town and the nearer stretches of sand. Behind her in the darkness was a violent thrashing, an angry mutter of words. Paul's voice and thought came to her, but she stayed where she was, alert to intercept any wanderer coming their way.

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"Walk!" Paul demanded in a low, stinging tone.

"*No*, damn you—damn you!"

Slater stood ankle-deep in the warm lapping waters of the Gulf, his face turned stiffly away from shore. An unguessable distance away the dim lights of a solitary freighter seemed to move along the surface of the sea.

"*Walk*," Paul whispered.

Slater jerked one foot through the turgid water, fumbled for a place to put it down and them moved the other. "*No*!" His feet continued a slow, unwilling movement of their own. "NO!" He tried to turn his head and look back, but he could not. "Stop it!"

"I'm not stopping," Paul declared savagely. "This is for Conklin, and Carnell, and Karen and Emily. Keep going, Slater."

The man continued walking into the sea, woodenly controlled as if he were a puppet.

Martha heard a minute sound.

"*Paul*?"

"*Yes, angel.*"

"Is *he* . . ?"

"*He's gone.*"

She was trembling again. "*I'm not sorry.*"

Paul moved up beside her on the sand. "Stop thinking about him," he whispered. "Where's your brother? Where's that boat he promised?"

Martha pointed to the darkened sea. "Out there, Paul. Can't you see it?"

He strained his eyes and when they would not reward him, fell back on his receptivity, exerting his mental reaches to the utmost. "No. I can't."

She laughed softly in the night and reached for his hand. "I'm in for more teaching, I can see that." She pointed once more and he attempted to follow her finger. "He's there, about three hours out. He will pick us up before dawn. Now *you* stop worrying."

"I'm not worried," he assured the girl. "Only concerned. I don't want some drunk to stumble along here and find us." And then he caught the laughter in her mind.

"But, Paul, we can be pink elephants to him."

He moved nearer until their bodies were touching. "I want only two things right now, and neither of them is drunks or elephants." When she did not answer, he added silently, "*The island is the second thing.*"

Martha had her arms around him. "*You lovely freak.*"

Wilson Tucker

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As evidence of the growing demand for science-fiction in this country, the current review shelf offers, I am sure, the most extensive selection of books in the genre published in one month. No less than seven different publishers contribute to this sudden plethora of science-fiction, with six novels and three collections of short stories; and there is every indication that in the next few months many more are to follow, as other publishers, cautiously enter the field.

It is no coincidence that the new novels fall naturally into one cohesive category, for the basic theme of each—that of some aspect of space travel—is no doubt considered a safe bet for attracting sales beyond the minimum library orders, particularly by the publishers making their first entry into the science-fiction market. I have yet to be convinced of the validity of this reason, and with such a divergence of treatment, style and quality shown in these new books, a less determined reader, chancing on these books in the wrong sequence, may well give up and go back to detectives or westerns. The uniformly blatant dust jackets (three of which bear marked similarity), may leave only the colour-blind in any doubt as to the contents, and they are catered for by the " Science Fiction " label. Forgive me for harping on a favourite topic, but I do feel that science fiction would get a better deal with some rather more tasteful wrappers.

My first choice was automatic since I have an uncommon liking for the work of Fredric Brown, whose psychological thrillers, with their overtones of cynicism strangely mixed with fantasy, are widely popular both here and in America, and who has doubly accomplished some very successful science fiction. His new novel, **Project Jupiter** (Boardman 9/6), exceeded all expectations.

Within a simple story framework of the preparation for an interplanetary expedition, he has contrived a realistic and moving study, without the technicalities, of man's inevitable exodus into outer space, and the human problems inherent in this achievement. By the end of this century the discovery of an atomic drive provides the impetus to reach out to the Moon, Mars and Venus. But the small practical results for such enormous expense are not sufficient to sustain the enthusiasm of the tax-paying public. Yet, because there will be

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people like the star-dusted Max Andrews, a not-so-young rocket mechanic, and Ellen Gallagher, the senator from California who is determined to send a spaceship around Jupiter, man's drive to the stars will not be denied. This book deals with the political struggles to maintain the project, and the efforts of Max Andrews to realise his own ambition, surprisingly thwarted in a neat plot-twist.

The other import from America is **West Of The Sun** by Edgar Pangborn (Robert Hale 9/6), a first science fiction novel from an accomplished author, and an occasion for some measure of congratulation to the publishers as the first of their science fiction list. Mr. Pangborn observes some of the tenets of *science*-fiction, but not many, being more concerned with telling an interesting story, with an observant eye for detail and characterisation. A party of six interstellar space travellers, four men and two women, have been voyaging for eleven years and finally become marooned on their destination, the planet Lucifer, several light-years away from our solar system. They are able to exist in the strange new surroundings, are befriended by a race of giant, white-furred humanoids, and get involved in a conflict between warring pygmy tribes. The gradual establishment of a ne[w] way of life on Lucifer is unfolded with exciting detail, and both hum[an] and alien characters are drawn with warmth and realism. For [all] this is a modern version of the "classic" novel of early fant[asy] redeemed from banality by the unerring skill of a first-rate novel[ist].

Also meticulously written, if a trifle pedantic at times, is another first novel by an English writer. However, if Jeffery Lloyd Castle, whose **Satellite E One** (Eyre & Spottiswoode 10/6), is an excellent and thoroughly competent piece of science fiction, can continue in this vein, his will become a name to reckon with in this field. It concerns the construction and organisation of a man-made space-satellite encircling the Earth, and Mr. Castle has obviously made a very careful study of the technical aspects of his subject, which has been freely discussed in the many non-fiction books on space travel now available. Arthur C. Clarke had a tentative nibble at this idea in his *Islands in the Sky* but **Satellite E One** is much superior, and is the kind of story I feel that Clarke should have written. Comparisons are inevitable, and I must admit that Mr. Castle lacks Clarke's ease of narrative and smoothness of style, but nevertheless, I consider that this is the type of *science*-fiction, unsensational and extremely convincing sorely needed to attract more enthusiasts.

Space does not allow me to review more than the best three books this month but titles not listed will be mentioned next month together with further new publications.

Leslie Flood

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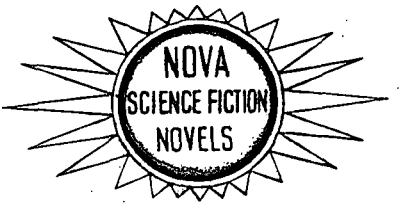

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